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Polyphony  
and the Anxiety of Influence  
in the Fiction of Henry James

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## CONTENTS

1. Summary	6
2. Introduction	7
3. <u>The Aspern Papers</u> : A Realistic Deconstruction of Romance	52
4. <u>The Tragic Muse</u> : The Critical Reception and the Problem of Reading	125
5. Polyphony and Influence in <u>The Tragic Muse</u>	176
6. Henpecking and Cockfighting: Influence in the <u>Fin-de-Siècle</u> Tales of Henry James	236
7. Conclusion: The Masters and Their Master	321
10. Bibliography	329

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FOR

AMAL

FADI & RASHA

WITH LOVE

## ABBREVIATIONS

1. AN.      The Art of the Novel
2. AP:      The Aspern Papers
3. CT:      The Complete Tales
4. LHJ:      The Life of Henry James
5. RH:      Roderick Hudson
6. TM:      The Tragic Muse

All references to the works of Henry James are to the following editions unless otherwise noted:

The Complete Tales of Henry James, edited by L. Edel, 12 vols.

(London, 1962-4)

The Novels and Tales of Henry James, 26 vols., New York edition

(New York, 1907-9; 1917)

## SUMMARY

James's fiction, especially in the Middle Phase, centres on the figure of the artist, and is characterized by the two interrelated aspects which previous criticism has largely overlooked: the Bakhtinian 'polyphonic' creation of 'author-thinkers'; and the conflict between ephebes and precursors, for which Harold Bloom's concept of 'the anxiety of influence' is the most illuminating model. Polyphony is the narrative mode, and influence is the intra-artistic theme. These, as the Introduction to the thesis makes clear, are rehearsed in James's inaugural novel, Roderick Hudson. Rowland Mallet is an author-thinker, and his failure is caused by authorial limitations. His monologism is impaired by his mistaking empathy for the authorial sympathy. Likewise, Hudson's failure does not arise from a mercurial temperament, but from a polyphonic shortcoming: not possessing the power of fiction to contain the fiction of power in his mentor. And the relationships among the three artists - Gloriani, Hudson and Singleton - perfectly exemplify the Bloomian theme. It is these two concepts, polyphony and influence, which are the major preoccupation in the Middle Phase, as the works chosen demonstrate. These are a novella, a novel, and a number of short stories all of which have been unjustifiably neglected. Chapter One, on The Aspern Papers, argues that Tina Bordereau, far from being the artless victim seen by many critics, actually challenges and defeats the narrator by the very form of her narrative. Her 'realist' discourse undermines his language of 'romance', and shows up its internal instability. Chapter Two is an extensive study of the critical reception of The Tragic Muse. The most common areas of critical attention have been its contemporary topicality, its relation to previous novels on similar themes, and the possible genealogy of Gabriel Nash. Those have all missed the core of the work. Chapter Three demonstrates how polyphony and the anxiety of influence make the novel what it really is. Influence arises from the juxtaposition of, and the wrestling between, artistic ephebes and their precursors (Nick and Nash, Miriam and Madame Carré). The dialogic quality defined by Bakhtin is crucial to the proper, and even-handed, characterization of all the conflicts in the novel. And since most of James's tales in the eighties and nineties are about masters and acolytes, the anxiety of influence remains central. Chapter Four is a study of 'The Author of Beltraffio' and 'The Lesson of the Master'. Again the characters' manipulations are a crucial focus in a way that Gérard Genette's terminology helps to illuminate. The fact that the ephebe is the author-thinker emphasizes the inextricability of the Bakhtinian and the Bloomian in James. Just as polyphony offers a different focus for explicating the poetics of James's fiction, so the ephebal conflict provides the basis for a fresh perception of James's own artistic struggle.

INTRODUCTION

Any reading saturated in the Jamesian oeuvre, covering all the novels and tales, reveals that the narrative mode of the Jamesian work is consistently, in Bakhtin's terms, 'polyphonic': characters are represented as being in charge of their own performances. James always reiterates that he 'muffles' his voice, and gives it to the characters. This makes them 'author-thinkers', and makes the conflict between them a wrestling between 'author-thinkers' too. Furthermore, the reader who goes through all James's corpus is aware how many characters become artists by profession, especially in the Middle Phase. Here, they are either ephebes or precursors. The younger ones engage their Masters in an attempt to become Masters themselves. This conflict, as will be seen later, is a constant reworking of what Harold Bloom has called the anxiety of influence.

To focus in this way on the characters is controversial in the critical reception of James. Some critics argue that the characters are illustrations, mouthpieces, or mere manikins. Among these are S. Gorley Putt, Maxwell Geismar, and Leon Edel.<sup>1</sup> Others, including Richard Poirier, John Bayley and Kenneth Graham, rightly point out that James represents his characters as others. He disengages himself from them, and distinguishes them from each other. Poirier believes that the author's recession is ethical: James finds it ethically questionable to tamper with the freedom of others.<sup>2</sup> John Bayley thinks that it all arises from 'love'. The author who loves his characters represents them as independent.<sup>3</sup>

As will be argued in Chapter Four, these critics all touch on an essential issue, but they fail to come to grips with the poetics of polyphony. Other critics, more appropriately, write not about James but about the characters themselves, such as Christopher Newman, Daisy Miller, Isabel Archer, Gilbert Osmond, Gabriel Nash, Maisie, Kate Croy, Lambert Strether, and Maggie Verver. These characters have all properly been held accountable for their own discourse and demeanour, which confirms their being author-thinkers. Leo Bersani, talking about the governess, says that she is idealized 'to the point where the essentially conventional distinction between character and author disappears'.<sup>4</sup> This recalls what Bakhtin says about the critical reception of Dostoevsky. He observes that the 'literature' devoted to that polyphonist seems to be about not 'a single-author-artist', who has written all the novels; but about 'several author-thinkers', such as Raskolnikov, Myshkin and others.<sup>5</sup>

Approaching the characters polyphonically entails focusing on them as authors at work. As this thesis demonstrates in detail, each character engages two narratives equivalent to a novelist's fabula and sjuzhet: the 'events' are consciously re-presented. Furthermore, all of these characters are self-conscious about the performance of language, the approaches they adopt, and the designs they make. Hence their creative and critical activities are always foregrounded in the text. This applies not only to the heroes, the heroines, and the famous manipulators, but to those conventionally characterized by critics as innocents.<sup>6</sup>



In view of the sheer pervasiveness of these themes in James's fiction, the thesis concentrates on a significant moment in his career: the Middle Phase, in which James's problems come to a head, and the oeuvre homes in explicitly on artistic questions. From this period are selected a novella, a novel, and a number of short stories, all unjustifiably neglected. The thesis thus offers a new approach to James: viewing the characters as author-thinkers, which makes the single work a multiplicity of texts. From this point of view, the critic's task is to disentangle them, and to unearth the primal narratives camouflaged by the superstructure of make-believe. Just as the polyphonic composition makes the text labyrinthine, polyphonic criticism makes it yield its proper complexity. In arguing this case, the thesis highlights a blind-spot in the critical reception of James, and suggests its representative importance to our understanding of his fiction. The relative neglect of the works discussed in this thesis is the neglect of an important aspect of James's oeuvre at large.

The first chapter is devoted to The Aspern Papers. The narrator has been viewed as a scoundrel, a villain, an epitome of innocence, and as a 'historian', but never as an author-thinker. Chapter One represents him as a first-person narrator in charge of his composition. He engages two narratives. The first is a realistic enterprise for getting the documents from the Misses Bordereau. The second is a 'romance' self-consciously designed to ambiguate the primal story. The paraphernalia of 'romance' and the rubrics of the real are

intrinsically at loggerheads, which makes them continuously deconstruct each other. The deconstruction is enhanced by Tina's role.

Tina is not, as critics call her, artless. She is in charge of her performance and, like the narrator, she has two narratives: the quest for a husband, and the make-believe of innocence. The second gives birth to the naive persona that critics mistake for the real character. Tina's approach is realistic. Hence there is no incongruity between the two levels of her discourse. Her approach embraces the repertoire of realism, as the focus on semiotics and stylistics in James's narrative will demonstrate. The Chapter offers an original reading of Tina, a different understanding of the narrator, and a new approach to the novella: two author-thinkers engaging two approaches and four narratives. Semiotics is central to the chapter.

The Tragic Muse is one of the most neglected works of Henry James despite the fact that its place in the history of his career, and its own quality, entitle it to be, as James himself recommends, one of his major novels. Chapter Two surveys its critical reception, and engages specific readings of The Tragic Muse as ways of reading James generally. It becomes clear that social 'topicality', the possible 'genealogy' of Gabriel Nash, and the questions of influence as rehearsed by some critics, are both a misreading, and an 'under-reading', of the novel. Hence the problem of reading The Tragic Muse is debated at the end of Chapter Two. This section



demonstrates that the novel is structured upon polyphony as a narrative mode, and upon influence as a theme (a study of the creative relationship between James and Shakespeare is included). The inextricability of these two issues is focused by representing the ephebes and their precursors as author-thinkers. Put differently, the clash between monologism and polyphony takes the dimension of the precursor trying to 'destroy' the acolyte, or the acolyte trying to overtake the predecessor. This applies to the following: Nick<->mother; Nick<->father; Nick<->Carteret; Nick<->Julia; Miriam<->mother; Miriam<->Peter. Most importantly, it is what happens between Nick and Nash on the one hand, and Miriam and Madame Carré on the other.

Chapter Three offers the new reading of The Tragic Muse. The first section is about the narrative mode of the novel. Hence it begins by showing the remarkable correspondence between the dynamics of the narrative and the repertoire of polyphony as charted by Bakhtin. Then the characters are introduced as author-thinkers in their own right. Julia weaves a narrative of politics to cover up her love for Nick; Lady Agnes resorts to sentimentalism to domineer over her children; Nick creates a grand narrative of make-believe to contain all the other characters. There is a new understanding of Julia. She is not a worshipper of politics, but a goddess of love. And there is a radically new appreciation of Nick Dormer. He is neither the floundering artist nor the weakness of the novel, as James and some critics believe. And as in The Aspern Papers, the focus on language is paramount, for Julia's discourse is



exclusive, while Lady Agnes's is governed by assimilation; but Nick manipulates language as a mocking medium; which helps him take all the other characters for a ride. The Jamesian focus on language, and the varieties of discourse, will be addressed in the section on The Europeans.

The second Part of Chapter Three concentrates on the theme rehearsed within the polyphonic narrative arena. It is the anxiety of influence. To demonstrate the centrality of this conflict, there is a survey of the multiple forms of influence and the intra-artistic struggle in the text. Then, two examples are selected as case studies of the wrestling between the ephebe and the precursor: Miriam and her mother, and Miriam and Madame Carré.

Chapter Four is a study of 'The Author of Beltraffio' and 'The Lesson of the Master'. The conflict between the narrator and Mark Ambient is triadic. For the narrator engages the precursor, his wife, and their son. However, since the tale is, by definition, a retrospective narrative by a latecomer, there is a close focus on the narrator's self-conscious manipulation of time. Gérard Genette's Narrative Discourse is used as a frame of reference, for its mapping of time is particularly illuminating of the narrator's temporal manoeuvres. Moreover, like all the characters mentioned above, the narrator weaves an overt narrative of marital henpecking to cover the real theme of influence. The purpose is to make believe that he is merely an observing narrator, not telling his own story but someone

else's. He also wants to mystify his own anxiety, for he cannot be under the influence of a henpecked 'master'.

The second section of the chapter is about 'The Lesson of the Master'. Paul Overt, the ephebe, does not resort to temporal sabotage. He focuses on language, plays on the precursor's discourse, and means it differently. The result is that the misreading becomes the reading; the metaphorical, the literal; and the master, the ephebe. The specificity of the tale is the polarity between the mental image and the actuality, or the myth and the man. Hence the rehearsal of the anxiety of influence on an intertextual level. The way Paul wrestles with, and replaces, Henry St. George, is paradigmatic of the way the tale itself re-writes the folktale 'St. George and the Dragon'. Henry St. George, the precursor, not only turns into a belated acolyte, but loses his correspondence to the Saviour, and becomes the Dragon. By contrast, Paul Overt is both the new master and the new Saviour.

#### I. From the Striker to the Mallet:

##### The Fiction of Power and the

##### Power of Fiction in Roderick Hudson

Polyphony, as a narrative mode, and the anxiety of influence, as a theme, are not limited to the works selected in the thesis, for they are rehearsed in other texts, such as James's inaugural work Roderick Hudson. The importance of this novel is that it introduces the whole of James's oeuvre, both thematically and technically. It sets the scene for the

'International Theme', which enunciates not only a number of books, such as The American, Daisy Miller, The Europeans and The Portrait, but a new genre. Central to this is the figure of the American girl: Mary Garland begins the saga. Moreover, the figure of the American collector, Rowland Mallet, is the model for later collectors; such as Gilbert Osmond in The Portrait, and Adam Verver in The Golden Bowl. And the way the mother, Mrs. Light, relates to her daughter Christina is paradigmatic of what goes on between Claire and her family in The American; Catherine and her father in Washington Square; or Nick and Lady Agnes in The Tragic Muse. Similarly, the lecturing Singleton's sister does about women's welfare will be the major theme of The Bostonians. And the 'fantastic' in Chapter Sixteen, in which Mallet thinks he meets the devil, and combats it, anticipates The Turn of the Screw. Of course, what Mallet does to the Hudsons - dropping on them, as if in a fairy tale, and disturbing their quiet and monotonous life - anticipates what Eugenia and Felix Young do to the Wentworths in The Europeans; and what the narrator does to the Misses Bordereau in The Aspern Papers. And had it not been for Christina, perhaps there would have been no Princess Casamassima (see Preface to the latter novel).

More importantly, the figure of the artist, as inaugurated by Roderick, and the complications of his career, will be the major preoccupation of the works of the Middle Phase. The kind of anxiety he has about his medium, as compared with other forms of art, and the limitations imposed upon him by his mentor, are central to The Tragic Muse. Mallet relates to him



almost in the same way as Carteret relates to Nick Dormer: controlling the artist through the control of money. And the specific relationship between the artist and his muse - Roderick and Christina Light - is germinal of the conjunction between Nick and Miriam Rooth; or Henry St. George and Miss Fancourt in 'The Lesson of the Master'. It is significant that in the later works the artist-mentor conflict and the artist-muse narrative both end differently from what happens here. The change lies in the polyphonic dimension the artists of the Middle Phase come to possess (in their becoming author-thinkers).

These common denominators are part of the introductory nature of Roderick Hudson, which has been remarked by many critics, most notably by Edel.<sup>7</sup> But the issues central to both the novel and the whole oeuvre, particularly in the Middle Phase, have been skated over. These are polyphony and the anxiety of influence. For some of the characters are indeed authorial surrogates, such as Rowland Mallet. Others are artists: Roderick Hudson, Gloriani, Sam Singleton, and Augusta Blanchard. The relationships among the first three, as will be seen, perfectly exemplify the anxiety of influence.

The focus on the characters is rehearsed by John Scherting. Building on Oscar Cargill's position that Mallet is not 'flawless', he argues that the novel is 'primarily a subtle but persistent attack on those who seek to direct the destiny of others by imposing absolute standards of conduct on the lives of their fellow human beings'.<sup>8</sup> He concludes that

'Obviously Roderick is not a flawless hero.' His principal weakness as a person is his mercurial temperament rather than a lack of will power ... Nor is Rowland the villain of the piece. His errors were errors of judgement, not acts of malice'<sup>9</sup>.

Scherting touches on the issue, but fails to put it into the perspective the novel calls for: polyphony. The authorial delegates succeed or fail as a result of the mode they use. Others fail simply because they do not have that dimension. Roderick, for instance, fails not (only) because of his lack of 'will power', or of having a 'mercurial temperament', but because of a polyphonic shortcoming. Being significantly a sculptor - not a painter, an actor, or a writer - Hudson is as naked as a bust. What he needs is a make-believe, and a second narrative. He needs the power of fiction to shield him against the fiction of power of his rich mentor. Indeed, the first discrepancy in the novel is the disjunction between the title and the text. The first refers to Hudson, whereas the second is dominated by Rowland Mallet (see the Preface). Hence Hudson is not only exposed on the title page, but he functions as a cover-up for, and a distraction from, Mallet.

Mallet is the opposite. He wants to be a 'sheep-dog' (RH, p.235); but the Jamesian genre, as William Dean Howells says, has no room for 'the round-up' or the 'cattle ranch'<sup>10</sup>. Rowland is not (simply) interfering with another's destiny: he is an 'author-thinker'; not only creating, but trying to shape the world in a certain mode. Hence his failure does not arise from the project as such, but from his mode of authorship. He



is James's authorial surrogate, and is delegated to be in charge of the narrative.<sup>11</sup> One course of action for him is to do what James has done, what Ralph Touchett does for Isabel Archer, or what Strether does in The Ambassadors: delegating in the same spirit. But unlike them, Mallet is not polyphonic. He chooses to be inside the characters' heads thinking, and speaking, for them, as if he were the only voice in the novel, or as if the characters were definable for him.

The irony is that his omniscience turns out to be myopic, exactly as his omnipotence proves to be impotent. For despite having his headquarters inside the other characters' heads, he fails to come to grips with what they have on their minds. He mistakes his own voice for theirs, projects his desires onto them, and attributes his internal conflict to them. As Philip Weinstein says, 'Rowland commits the Jamesian heresy ... of shifting his burden to Roderick's neophyte conscience'.<sup>12</sup> Hence his reading becomes a misreading; and his representation, a mis-representation: his 'I' overrides his 'eye'.<sup>13</sup> For instance, he always insinuates that Mary is in love with him. At the end of the novel, he realizes that his representation of her is untrue. It is as false as his portrayal of Christina, whom he beholds as a flirting, insincere actress. To his dismay, she is very 'sincere', as she reiterates to him, and as the text endorses. More importantly, he keeps reiterating that Hudson is enigmatic, mercurial and immoral. As the text testifies, Hudson is transparent, often self-controlled, and morally good. Indeed, some of the accusations Mallet files against Hudson apply to Mallet himself.

Hence there must be something in Mallet's performance that explains his anticlimactic authorship, and puts his total failure into perspective. The main discrepancy is not ethical, for what happens is not an instance of villainy. It cannot be attributed to a parasitic design either.<sup>14</sup> John Scherting argues that it is an 'error of judgement', which is clearly a begging of the question (quoted above). For an 'error of judgement' is itself the result of something deeper: an erratic performance. Mallet's failure arises from his mode of composition, and more specifically, from engaging two irreconcilable narratives. (All these issues are central to James's fiction, as will be demonstrated in the thesis.)

The focus, therefore, must be on Mallet's performance. For Poirier, he is 'sane and reasonable and above all selfless'.<sup>15</sup> For Edel, Mallet 'possesses the cool and measured mind, [and] the dispassionate heart'.<sup>16</sup> Such comments explain why the two critics, who echo some of the contemporary critical reception of the novel, call Mallet a 'witness' and an 'observer'.<sup>17</sup> This clearly overlooks the complexity of the two narratives: 'creating' Hudson and loving Mary.<sup>18</sup> The complication arises, as expected, from the fact that Mary is engaged to Hudson. Most critics acknowledge Mallet's passion for Mary Garland, but they do not heed the way it governs the other narrative.<sup>19</sup> Overlooking this story means that it is not different from the Augusta-Mallet anecdote; whereas it is, in terms of function, duration, and impact, as violent as its foil narrative: the affair between Hudson and Christina Light



(Mallet wants to take Mary from Hudson, and Hudson wants to take Christina from Prince Casamassima.)

The priority of Mallet's quest for a woman is not something the reader should overlook. The narrator, as if to alert us to the primacy of this aspect, foregrounds it at the beginning of the text. Mallet is reported as having toiled hard to get married to Cecilia, but to no avail. However, Cecilia promises to invite a number of women so that he can choose. Then, the narrator emphasizes that this aspect, 'chivalry', is deeply rooted in Mallet: not only central to his character, but characteristic of his predecessors too: 'The little profession of ideal chivalry ... was not quite so fanciful on his lips as it would have been on those of many another man' (p.9). And in a naturalistic sense, the narrator adds that this predilection goes back to Mallet's maternal grandfather. Mallet's chivalry sometimes sounds Quixotic, for he insinuates, in Chapter Twenty-Two, that he is doing everything for Mary's sake, which recalls Don Quixote and his Dulcinea del Toboso. Thus it can be inferred that Mallet's attachment to Mary Garland will govern his future, in the same way as his past informs his present.

The text smacks of Rowland's love of Mary. It starts the moment she makes her debut; it takes root in Northampton wood; and flourishes, as Mallet thinks, in Europe. When they go back to America, it returns with him. Suffice it here to mention three moments as evidence of Mallet's love. At the end of Chapter Four, Hudson mentions his own engagement to Mary,



'Rowland sat staring; though the sea was calm it seemed to him that the ship gave a great dizzying lurch'. Moreover, he 'listened to all this with a feeling that fortune had played him an elaborately devised trick' (RH,pp.82,83). The second instance is the dialogue between Mallet and Madame Grandoni in Chapter Nineteen. She says, 'At one moment you tell me the girl's plain ... the next you tell me she's lovely ... one thing is very clear; you're in love with her down to the ground ... you've been in love with her these two years' (RH,p.365). This is endorsed in Chapter Twenty-Five. Here, Mallet plays his last card, and reveals his primal story to Hudson: he has been in love with Mary 'Since I first knew her' (RH,p.510).

The conflict between the two narratives is deconstructive and detrimental. 'Creating' Roderick superhumanizes Mallet, and represents him as a rational, selfless, dispassionate god - always outside the narrative arena. Loving Mary humanizes him into a flawed, passionate, self-centered character - always inside the narrative arena. James alerts the reader to the function of the first narrative: 'the beautiful little problem was to keep it [Rowland's consciousness] connected, connected intimately, with the general human exposure, and thereby bedimmed and befooled and bewildered, anxious, restless, [and] fallible' (AN,p.16).<sup>20</sup> The complexity of the two narratives is beyond Mallet.<sup>21</sup> The second, patronizing Hudson, is a mystification of Mallet's 'romance'. But the latter, like any primal story, is subversive of falsification, which engenders a dialectic between muffling and 'exposure'. The intensity of the conflict takes the form of the 'fantastic' (Chapter Sixteen):

the hidden threatening to surface, and the unfamiliar struggling to unseat the familiar, which jeopardizes the orchestration, and the verisimilitude, of Mallet's composition.<sup>22</sup> In short, his authorial mode, monologism, will be impaired.

Mallet's monologism is manifest throughout the text. A perfect example is the way he talks to Christina Light about Roderick Hudson: 'I made him burn his ships, I brought him to Rome, I launched him into the world' (RH, p.284).<sup>23</sup> The cluster of 'I's', and representing the self as the 'maker', signify the image of god, which is self-consciously sounded in Chapter Twenty-Two. Mary asks Mallet to accompany them out of Italy, but he pretends to be interested in staying behind: 'I can be your hidden providence, you know; I can watch you at a distance and come upon the scene at critical moments' (RH, p.461).<sup>24</sup>

This predilection for monologism is endorsed by the variety of roles Mallet wants to play.<sup>25</sup> All of them are forms of patronization: building a hospital, an orphanage, or patronizing the whole of America by importing works of art from Europe. However, this is not unexpected, for Mallet's father has been a great monologist. The latter has domineered over the family, and has made the mother spend her life in total compliance (RH, pp.9-12). Moreover, the father has controlled his son by controlling the flow of money - something Mallet himself will do to Roderick Hudson.

It is from within such a context that Rowland Mallet comes into the novel.<sup>26</sup> And it is the same context that he is trying to sustain, but whether or not he succeeds is the question. The beginning of the novel rehearses the problem. Mallet's first project is to manipulate his cousin Cecilia, but that 'sarcastic', mocking woman manages to turn the tables on him: 'Mallet's compassion was really wasted, because Cecilia was a very clever woman and a skilful counter-plotter to adversity ... her cleverness seemed somehow to make charity difficult and patronage impossible' (RH, pp.1-2). This spells out the necessary details: Mallet's monologism (charity and patronage), the effective antidote (counter-plotting, or being an author-thinker), and most importantly, Mallet's limitation.

This limitation is mistaking empathy for the authorial sympathy.<sup>27</sup> There is a difference between Mallet's attempt to help Cecilia find a husband, and his endeavour to be that husband. Helping Mary Garland by bringing her closer to Hudson, which an author may do, is different from helping her by trying to possess her. Similarly, stopping Hudson from breaking his own neck at the Coliseum is an act of authorial sympathy. But Mallet's performance of the same stunt is a perfect example of 'empathy'. And being Hudson's mentor, or providence, is also an instance of authorial sympathy, but trying to be Hudson himself, to succeed through him, to take every sculpture he makes, and to marry the woman Hudson is engaged to, perfectly exemplify empathy that verges on antipathy.



This is the crux of an important dialogue between Mallet and Madame Grandoni. He tells her that Mary is engaged to another man, and that he himself has no claim. She replies, 'you ought to be what you say - perhaps mendaciously - that you're not' (RH,p.367). But Hudson warns Mallet against empathy. Hudson, who knows that he himself is the central character, says to Mallet, 'You ask too much, it seems to me - for a man who himself has no occasion to play the hero' (RH,p.504). Hudson is not hallucinating, for his injunction has already been signalled by the narrator, who calls Mallet 'The obscure hero' (RH,p.307).

Mallet's empathy jeopardizes his position. He becomes, as mentioned earlier, both an authorial surrogate in charge of the narrative, and a character in the same narrative. The god-like monologist, who should disengage himself from the arena, becomes a puppet in his own show. It is no longer the mentor Rowland Mallet, but the Mallet-turned-persona, who orchestrates the novel. Hence his position of command, and authority of discourse, are relativized. His composition becomes, as Hudson says, 'like something in a bad novel' (RH,p.511).

Indeed, Mallet's performance is a 'bad novel', as demonstrated by the way he represents Mary Garland to Hudson; the continuous attempt to undermine their engagement; the constraints, and the animal imagery, he projects on Roderick; the manipulation of 'facts'; the perverted perception of, and response to, whatever befalls the others (pp.424,456,510,517); the 'fantastic' manifestation of his confused composition in

Chapter Sixteen; and the fiction of power he projects throughout the text. For instance, the information he holds from Mrs. Hudson about Roderick plays with her horizon of expectations, and deals her a tragic blow. The way he suppresses Christina's sincerity from Hudson misleads, and enhances the tragedy, of the latter. Likewise, keeping his infatuation with Mary till the end gives Roderick the knock-out. Even then, when Mary asks him about the cause of Hudson's disappearance, he conceals the truth.

Mallet's fiction of power is repeatedly emphasized in the way he relates to the others. He does not approach them on their own terms, but tells them what they are, or what they are not. Like a god, he defines them for themselves. For instance, to undermine the relationship between Christina and Hudson, he tells Christina that, by definition, she is not for Roderick: 'by character and by destiny ... You're not made to be an artist's wife' (p.287). He does the same about Hudson and Mary. First he says that Roderick does not see Mary 'all round' (p.86; only a god sees all round). Mallet defines Mary as the woman who will be 'right about everything'. This is a subversive definition, and Hudson quite rightly thinks of it as 'a horrible description of one's future bride' (p.89).

These incidents are samples of the larger fiction that Mallet practises on the characters almost without exception. The novel as a whole, transforming Hudson into a celebrity, is a fiction of power. Hudson has believed it, and so have Cecilia, Mrs. Hudson, and Mary Garland. Its credibility arises



from the fact that Mallet is rich, that he has the means to translate words into action, and turn persons into personalities. The only character not to take the project seriously is Mr. Striker. He describes sculpture in a way that anticipates the complexity of the two narratives and the anticlimactic ending: 'Well, there you are with your model in an attitude on one side, yourself in an attitude too, I suppose, on the other, and your pile of clay in the middle, building up, as you say' (p.60).

The enterprise, as a fiction of power, will not succeed unless applied with power too. Mallet's patronization of Hudson is a register of it: setting standards for him, overworking him, embarrassing him with his mother and Mary, controlling him through the flow of money, and relating to him as if he himself were a lion-tamer or a 'broncobuster'. In Chapter Five, Rowland says 'to himself that if he had staked his reputation on bringing out a young lion he ought now to pass for a famous connoisseur' (p.103). In Chapter Six he views himself as somebody 'who had been riding a blood-horse at a steady elastic gallop and of a sudden felt him stumble or shy' (p.126). No wonder Christina describes Mallet as 'Hudson's sheep-dog' (p.235). The effect of this exercise of power is best demonstrated by what Hudson says to Mallet: 'I've a feeling that you're always expecting something of me, that you're measuring my doings by a terrifically high standard. You're watching me, my dear fellow, as my mother at home watches the tea-kettle she has set to boil' (p.127). The irony is that

while projecting his fiction of power, Mallet deprives Hudson of the power to meet the requirements of that fiction.

Hudson says, 'I think that when you expect a man to produce beautiful and wonderful works of art you ought to allow him a certain freedom of action' (p.224). But Mallet does not. His control of, and continuous meddling with, Hudson's career push the latter to his death in the same way as Christopher Newman pushes Claire to another kind of death. Newman wants 'a great woman ... She must be as good as she's beautiful and as clever as she's good ... in a word, the best article in the market' (The American, p.49). When he meets Claire, he keeps telling her that she is the perfect image of the perfect wife he has in mind, which leaves Claire no room for manoeuvre and, as Virginia Fowler says, 'diminishes her sense of self worth and leads her into the convent'.<sup>28</sup>

The question is whether or not it has been possible for Roderick to escape the cliff; and Claire, the convent (both from the First Phase). Since Tina Bordereau does not die, Catherine Sloper does not commit suicide, and Nick Dormer - an artist - does not end like Roderick, the answer is that Roderick and Claire could have survived by adopting what the later characters have begun to use successfully: the power of fiction to contain the fiction of power (Sheherazade and Shahriyar). Put differently, they should have behaved, in a polyphonic sense, as author-thinkers.



The revealing irony here is that Roderick Hudson is accused by all the characters of making believe, being enigmatic, or acting as an author-thinker. The clearest example is Cecilia's letter to Mallet, in which she insinuates that Hudson is Janus-faced: 'There is one thing, however, to tell you as a friend and in a way of warning. That candid soul can keep a secret, and he may have private designs on your peace of mind'. The secret is that Hudson is 'engaged to Mary Garland' (p.131). Cecilia is wrong, for the first thing Hudson tells Mallet when they board the ship is the news about his engagement to Mary. Similarly, in Chapter Ten, Christina Light says that she finds it difficult to understand Hudson: 'I don't know him; I don't find him easy to know ... He says very fine things; but does he mean all he says?' (p.211). In Chapter Eighteen, Rowland feels that 'Roderick's reflecting surface exhibited, for the time, something of a blur' (p.353). And in Chapter Twenty-Three, the same point is repeated: 'there was a method in his [Roderick's] madness' (pp.471-20). All these instances, while accusing Hudson of having something he does not have, focus the importance of what is missing: fiction-making, and authorship.

Roderick's discourse and demeanour put paid to the accusations, and confirm that he is not a designing person. For instance, he not only reveals his engagement to Mallet, but also announces the ultimate purpose of his project: his success and the money he will make are for Mary. The first item poisons Mallet, but the second gives him the antidote. Depriving Hudson of both success and money will undermine the engagement.



Similarly, while in Germany, Hudson keeps reporting everything to Mallet, and continues to play into the hands of the person he should be playing with. The narrator describes Hudson's self-exposure as an 'unmitigated frankness' (p.138). This arises from Hudson's conviction that pretence is unnecessary: 'Why should I stand on ceremony with Mary and Mr. Mallet? ... Mary pretends to believe I'm a great man, and if she believes it as she ought nothing I can say will alter her opinion' (p.422). He still believes that make-believe is a matter of entertainment, not survival: 'Do I look as if I were happy and stirring you up with a stick for my amusement?' (p.425). (In 'The Birthplace', Morris Gedge, the caretaker, realizes that make-believe is inevitable.)

Hudson's exposure, and need of a fictional cover-up, are focused the moment Mallet reveals his love for Mary. Here, what matters for Hudson is not just losing or gaining Mary, and the morality or the immorality of Mallet. What worries him for the first time is the question of self-representation: the fact that he has not been an author-thinker, but a puppet: 'Altogether, I must have appeared simply hideous' (p.512). More hideous is his fatal mistake: replacing one master with another, Mr. Striker with Mallet. For it is easy to survive the striker, but it is difficult to survive the mallet. Rowland seems to be aware of the reference of his name. In Chapter Twenty-Five, after revealing his love, and seeing the shattering effect on Hudson, he feels that 'He had driven in, as it were, a nail, and found in the tap of his hammer, for once in a way, a sensation' (p.510).

By making Mallet a monologicistic surrogate, James explores the limitations of monologism, and distances himself from it. And by leaving Hudson exposed and transparent, James emphasizes the necessity of fiction as a means for self-protection and for containing those who have power. James develops this in his later works. For instance, Daisy Miller represents a departure from Roderick Hudson. Most critics think of her as an epitome of innocence. But the text demonstrates that her innocence is arguable. James gives her two names and two titles. She is both Annie, and Daisy; the 'young lady' and the 'young girl'. A careful study of the text reveals that it is Annie, the young lady, who is projecting the persona of Daisy, the young girl.

The maturing of the Jamesian character into an author-thinker is intensified in Washington Square. Dr. Sloper believes that Catherine is innocent. Hence he tries to run her life for her in the same way Mallet meddles with Hudson's. However, Dr. Sloper feels that Catherine's silence signifies 'volumes'. Indeed, it does, for it is a role she self-consciously plays. Every time she meets Morris she prefers 'that he should talk, and that she should simply look at him'.<sup>29</sup> And when she finds him with her aunt, she chooses not to join them. This makes Morris 'easier to contemplate than if she herself had been the object of his civilities' (p.20). Moreover, Catherine is represented as being capable of exercising judgements of a high order: 'To her mind there was nothing of the infinite about Mrs. Penniman whereas her father's great faculties seemed, as they stretched away, to lose themselves in a sort of luminous vagueness' (p.10). And



her resolution to play the 'obedient daughter' confirms that she cannot be innocent unless innocence means the state when nothing is wasted on the character. Aurora Church, in 'The Pension Beaurepas', keeps reiterating that the American girl is not a 'jeune fille', and refuses to play the role of the 'idiotically innocent'.

What Roderick Hudson, Claire de Bellegarde, Annie Miller, Catherine Sloper, Tina Bordereau, Nick Dormer, Isabel Archer, Kate Croy and Maggie Verver are confronted with is power. Each one is faced with a powerful figure. The Jamesian characters of the early First Phase fail to deal with 'it' properly. But the change takes place in the rest of James's career. Characters turn into author-thinkers, and manage to contain the fiction of power with the power of fiction: Catherine and her father, Tina and the narrator, and Maggie and Adam Verver. As will be seen in the thesis, fiction-making is the common denominator in the performances of most of the characters. The narrator in The Wings of the Dove comments on Kate Croy's personae-playing in a way that puts the issue into perspective: 'It wouldn't be the first time she had seen herself obliged to accept with a smothered irony other people's interpretation of her conduct. She often ended by giving up to them - it seemed really the way to live - the version that met their convenience' (pp.25-6).<sup>30</sup>

## II. The Anxiety of Influence

As well as introducing the narrative mode of polyphony, Roderick Hudson also introduces the artistic theme of influence.<sup>31</sup> Four characters are artists: Hudson, Gloriani, Sam Singleton, and Augusta Blanchard. Leon Edel and Kenneth Graham draw attention to them, but fall short of unravelling their roles. Edel thinks that their variety is the focus: 'James has placed before us ... four kinds of artist - the inspired, the clever, the persistent, the plodding'.<sup>32</sup> For Graham, they are the 'corrupt' artist, Gloriani; and the dreamers of 'the ideal vision', Hudson and Singleton.<sup>33</sup>

These comments are clearly too general to say anything about the specificity of what the artists are doing in the novel. They do not explain why they are classified into old, young and younger; or precursor, a new master and a young acolyte. They also fail to explain the different relationships between the artists. Why are Gloriani and Roderick antagonistic to each other? Why does Gloriani want to destroy Hudson? Why does Hudson want to overtake Gloriani? Why does Gloriani change from a predecessor to a belated acolyte? And why does Sam Singleton worship Hudson, not Gloriani?

The three artists get together at a dinner party at Mallet's place in Chapter Six. The discourse is focused: the topic is the 'aesthetic fraternity', among whom many 'were floundering in unknown seas, without a notion of which way their noses were turned'. Unlike them, Gloriani, for instance,

has brought his talent 'to perfection' (p.106). Hence he is called the 'highly modern master' (p.107). By contrast, Sam Singleton has all the credentials of the apprentice. He is 'short and spare', 'transparent', and 'modest'; and he 'blushed when he spoke'. Moreover, he 'had expressed a yearning approval of Roderick's productions, but he had not yet met the young master' (pp.108,109). This establishes the hierarchy of the three artists: a precursor, a young master, and an ephebe; and sets the scene for the anxiety of influence. The polarity of the precursor and the latecomer is sharply focused. Mallet, looking at Hudson and Gloriani, feels that

Roderick, bearing the lamp and glowing in its radiant circle, seemed the beautiful image of genius which combined sincerity and power. Gloriani, with his head on one side, pulling his long moustache like a genial Mephistopheles and looking keenly from half-closed eyes represented art with a mixed motive, skill unleavened by faith, the mere base maximum of cleverness (p.123).

This scene establishes not only the contrast between the two, but the trajectory of influence: the angelic versus the fiendish, and the messianic against the Mephistophelean, which anticipates the 'dragonian' dimension in 'The Lesson of the Master'. The Mephistophelean function is central to the theme of influence, for precursors are apt to destroy the ephebes. This function is immediately brought into action. Gloriani, out of context, talks about the death of Hudson's artistic power, which amounts to an early death of Hudson himself: 'My dear fellow, passion burns out, inspiration runs to seed'. Nothing will be left but 'lumps of clay', 'empty canvas', 'blank



paper', and 'suicide' (p.124). On the next page Hudson says, 'It's no use ... I give it up'. But this moment of withdrawal is followed by a phase of crossing: Hudson resumes his work, and produces masterpieces. Seeing them, Gloriani says to Mallet, significantly not to Hudson: 'He has taken his turn sooner than I supposed ... I congratulate him on having found his feet - or at least found such a smart pair of shoes' (p.147). This anticipates what the French actress says to Peter about Miriam in The Tragic Muse.

However, what happens confirms that emptying oneself out is nothing but a humbling of the other. Hence Gloriani and Singleton call on Hudson in Chapter Nine. The first congratulates Hudson on his sculpture of Christina; whereas Singleton 'sat for an hour in the very prostration of homage before both bust and artist. But Roderick's attitude in regard to this worshipper was one of undisguised though friendly amusement'. What Singleton says about Hudson is significant: '"Complete," that's what he is ... he has more genius than any one ... If that's not completeness where shall one look for it?' (p.190-1).

In Chapter Nineteen, Gloriani acknowledges Hudson's mastery. He puts it in a way that generalizes away his own uniqueness. Looking at the bust of Hudson's mother, Gloriani feels himself 'sold' and overtaken: 'You're strong enough never to think of me again'; and he discredits his earlier judgements, and confesses that he has been an ass (p.363). It is significant that Hudson's response is blushing and tears,

for these are, as will be seen, the signs of the completion of the anxiety of influence. The clearest sign comes from Singleton in Chapter Twenty-One. He disagrees with Mallet's judgement that Hudson is hopeless. Singleton believes that Hudson will be a 'great man'. Then he adds, 'he fascinates me; he's the sort of man one makes one's hero of'; and he prophesies that Hudson 'will stand there in extraordinary high relief, as beautiful and clear and complete as one of his statues' (p.416).

It is clear that Hudson is Gloriani's ephebe. Hence the conflict between them. But Singleton is Hudson's novice acolyte, which explains the worship. The relationship among the three suggests that to become a new master, the artist must unseat a precursor, and attract followers. This pattern anticipates a number of stories, such as 'The Author of Beltraffio' and 'the Death of the Lion'.

This reading, significantly different from Edel and Graham, is made possible by the concept, and the terms, of the anxiety of influence particularly as developed by Harold Bloom. These illuminate the conflict and help us come to grips with the intra-artistic theme, which is the major preoccupation of James's Middle Phase. The anxiety of influence is, by definition, the conflict between a young artist and a precursor. The first, bedevilled by belatedness, tries to achieve authority by defeating temporality: becoming the earlier, and reducing the predecessor to a latecomer. But this

important concern is much older than Bloom's mapping of it, and many critics have discussed the possibility, or the impossibility, of so standing time on its head.

T.S. Eliot, in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', suggests that criticism give up the search for 'originality', and concentrate on the area where the past permeates the present: 'We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed'. This is clearly ironic, for Eliot is against any approach that simply pits the individual talent against the tradition: 'if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously'.

Eliot's forebears are the 'Council of Gods'; and his latecomers, the plebeians at large. Hence the trafficking between them is, by and large, one-sided: 'The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly altered'.<sup>34</sup> Eliot does not represent influence as an inevitable path, or an inescapable conflict, but recommends it as a recipe for canonization. Acolytes can do without it unless they want to measure their 'emptiness' against the 'fullness' of the canon. In this case, engaging the past entails that the latecomer resign himself as



a 'catalyst', through which the dead come back to life. Otherwise, the order is complete, and any interplay is redundant. It is relevant to note that Bloom believes Eliot is 'deceiving us' here.<sup>35</sup> In other words, Eliot is creating his own participatory fiction while affecting to comment objectively on the influence theme.

Fifty years later, Walter Jackson Bate, addresses the same issue. He begins with a remark from Samuel Johnson, also quoted by Bloom, about the anxiety between two successive regimes: 'The burthen of government is increased upon princes by virtue of their immediate predecessors ... It is indeed always dangerous to be placed in a state of unavoidable comparison with excellence, and the danger is still greater when that excellence is consecrated by death'. Johnson extends his concept to literature: 'He that succeeds a celebrated writer has the same difficulties to encounter'.<sup>36</sup> Bate infers that the only alternatives available for the latecomers are either a cowardly surrender to the past, or a pusillanimous rupture with it: the 'artist, because of the spirit of emulation - because of his need to feel that he has a chance before the accumulated "perfection of the past" - is in danger either of giving up, or else of manicuring the past, or finally of searching for novelty for its own sake'.<sup>37</sup> Bate essentially reiterates Eliot's assumption about the superiority of tradition: the past locks ephebes either in or out.

Neither Eliot nor Bate chart the trajectory of influence, or the stages through which the young artist may get to

mastery. It is interesting that William James, in Talks to Teachers, maps out the future of the young talent. He explains that if the latecomer is to achieve 'invention', he/she has to go through the stages of 'imitation', 'emulation' and 'ownership'. 'Invention ... and imitation are the two legs ... on which the human race historically has walked'. 'Emulation is the impulse to imitate what you see another doing in order not to appear inferior'.<sup>38</sup> The stages are syntagmatic: 'As imitation slides into emulation, so emulation slides into Ambition; and ambition connects itself with Pugnacity and Pride'. Pugnacity is 'a general unwillingness to be beaten by any kind of difficulty'. If the young talent is not terminated, it will arrive at the stage of 'ownership'.<sup>39</sup>

This Map of Invention is remarkably close to Bloom's Primal Scene of Instruction, which 'presents a primal moment of fixation and repression - the moment of the origin of intertextuality'. The Scene comprises six phases the first of which is 'Election': the moment when the young artist 'is seized by an older artist's power'. This takes the transient form of 'Covenant', which reveals 'an agreement of poetic visions'. 'Rivalry' replaces 'Covenant', and engenders counter-inspirations. Such a minor substitution paves the way for a possible transumption when 'The apparently liberated ephebe offers himself as the true manifestation of the authentic poet (Incarnation); eventually the latecomer comprehensively revises the precursor (Interpretation), and ultimately recreates him in a new way (Revision)'.<sup>40</sup>



Bloom considers the Primal Scene an introduction to his Map of Misprision, which is particularly important for illuminating the anxiety of influence in James. This Map also comprises six revisionary ratios that represent the phases of the anxiety of influence. Each has its own images, rhetorical trope(s) and defence mechanism(s). The 'trope' is 'a willing error, a turn from literal meaning ... [and] therefore is a kind of falsification'.<sup>41</sup> Anna Freud makes the same point about the defence mechanisms, and confirms that their effects are 'omission, reversal, displacement of meaning, etc.'.<sup>42</sup>

The first ratio, 'Clinamen', or swerving away from the precursor, comprises the images of 'Presence and Absence', the trope of 'Irony', and the defence mechanism of 'reaction-formation'. The second ratio, 'Tessera', or antithetical completion, is projected by the images of 'the Part for the Whole or the Whole for the Part', the trope of 'Synecdoche', and the defence mechanisms of 'Reversal' and 'Turning against the Self'. The third, 'Kenosis', or humbling the self, is delivered into images of 'Fullness and Emptiness', the trope of 'Metonymy', and the defence mechanisms of 'Regression', 'Undoing' or 'Isolation'. The fourth ratio, 'Daemonization', or generalizing away the uniqueness of the predecessor and going for a 'personalized Counter-Sublime', uses the images of 'High and Low', the tropes of 'Hyperbole' and 'Litotes', and the defence mechanism of 'Repression'.<sup>43</sup> The fifth, 'Askesis', or the attainment of solitude, draws on images of 'Inside and Outside', the trope of 'Metaphor', and the defence mechanism of 'Sublimation'. The last ratio,



'apophrades', or the return of the dead, is signified by the images of 'early and late', the trope of 'metalepsis', and the defence mechanisms involved are 'Introjection' and 'Projection'.<sup>44</sup> The completion of the anxiety of influence is a defeat of temporality: authority, the artistic order, replaces priority, the temporal order.<sup>45</sup>

This is not the first time James has been approached this way. John Carlos Rowe has already written about it. First, he concentrates on the 'American anxiety', as manifested in James's Hawthorne, and argues that James has not only translated Hawthorne's romance into realism, but that he has 'mythologized Hawthorne as the last American innocent, alienated by the provinciality of young America, precisely to establish for himself a local and native American tradition that could be denationalized'.<sup>46</sup> Secondly, Rowe focuses on the 'Victorian anxiety', and the relationship between James and Trollope in particular: James has categorized Trollope as the last Victorian so that he can represent himself as the first modernist. Then without bringing the French into play, Rowe concludes that James finds the three traditions wanting, so he projects himself as their 'synthesis'.

Rowe's study is undoubtedly summative of much previous criticism. All the studies that address James's relationship to Hawthorne, the French (the impressionists and the naturalists, Balzac and others), the Victorian novelists, and even the younger writers such as H.G. Wells, are 'precursors' to Rowe's book. They all, in their own ways, emphasize the centrality of

the anxiety of influence in James; and confirm that James's den, the so-called 'Lamb House', is nothing but an over-crowded graveyard. "Every young man's heart," Malraux says, "is a graveyard in which are inscribed the names of a thousand dead artists but whose only actual denizens are a few mighty actual antagonistic ghosts."'.<sup>47</sup>

But the anxiety of influence is not limited to Hawthorne, or to James's criticism, in which he openly engages other artists and critics, such as 'The Lesson of Balzac', 'Guy de Maupassant' and 'The Art of Fiction'. For it is thematized in the novels and tales as well. It is rehearsed as a conflict between young artists and their masters, particularly in the Middle Period. As mentioned already, it surfaces in almost every work, which makes it undisputably the major preoccupation, and the focus, of that phase: 'The author of Beltraffio' (1884), 'The Lesson of the Master' (1888), The Tragic Muse (1890), 'Greville Fane' (1892), 'The Middle Years' (1893), 'The Death of the Lion' (1894), 'The Figure in the Carpet' (1896), 'John Delavoy' (1898), 'The Real Right Thing' (1899), 'The Great Good Place' (1900), and 'The Tree of Knowledge' (1900).

### III. Simulation and Dissimulation:

#### Language in The Europeans

Just as polyphony and influence are central to all James's oeuvre, so is language. The focus on it, and the way it used in The Aspern Papers and The Tragic Muse, structure James's other

works. Moreover, he himself keeps reiterating its paramount significance. In 'The Question of Our Speech', for instance, he says,

'All life ... comes back to the question of our speech, the medium through which we communicate with each other; for all life comes back to the question of our relations with each other. These relations are made possible, are registered, are verily constituted, by our speech, and are successful ... in proportion as our speech is worthy of its great human and social function; is developed, delicate, flexible, rich - an adequate accomplished fact'.<sup>48</sup>

This priority explains why James's lecture verges on preaching: 'I am asking you to take it from me, as the very moral of these remarks, that the way we say a thing, or fail to say it, fail to learn to say it, has an importance in life that it is impossible to overstate' (p.21). Hence it is language that delineates the differences between the characters. There are those who use it in a literal way; those who can manipulate it; and others who can transform it into an aesthetic medium.

The first group relate to language in a mono-dimensional way. They are apt to believe that words are a receptacle of intention. Moreover, their discourse tends to be unself-conscious about itself and its context. This is what David Smit calls 'psychological monism'; what Bakhtin calls 'style'; and what James labels evil: 'I must give a closer account of the evil against which I warn you ... that speaking badly is speaking with that want of attention to speech that we should blush to see any other of our personal functions compromised by - any other controllable motion, or voluntary



act of our lives' (pp.23-4).<sup>42</sup><sup>49</sup> As will be seen, most of the characters who belong to this category are American: 'millions and millions ... in our great country' (p.23).

The second group, mainly Europeans, are aware of the performance of speech: the ambiguity, and the 'otherness', of words. Hence, their language belongs to what David Smit calls 'dualism'; and their discourse is what Bakhtin describes as 'stylization'. By contrast to the Americans, who are capable only of self-representation, the Janus-faced Europeans can misrepresent themselves, project personae, and exercise deception. But beyond these two groups, there are a number of characters, most of them artists, who can disengage signifiers from signifieds, exorcize reference, and purify language into an art of making noise, as Nick Dormer says. This is what David Smit calls 'aesthetic monism'.

The three concepts are central not only to the works chosen in the thesis, but to James in general. They inform the transactions between most of the characters, such as the figurative speech of Ralph Touchett as opposed to his mother, who reiterates that she understands nothing but Yes and No; the dualistic Dr. Sloper and his 'pugilistic' sister, Lavinia Penniman; and the metaphorical Paul Overt, and the literal Henry St. George. Sometimes the three concepts structure the whole work, as in The Aspern Papers, and The Tragic Muse, both of which will be studied in detail later on. Suffice it here to refer to an earlier work in which 'psychological monism',

'dualism' and 'aesthetic monism,' are foregrounded and debated by the narrator and all the characters. It is The Europeans.

This highly schematized novel is structured upon the previous categories, as manifested in the ideolects of the Baroness Munster, her brother Felix Young (an artist), and the American Wentworths. The narrator draws attention to language when he problematizes understanding Eugenia. She and her brother talk about Robert Acton, whom she has declined to marry. She acknowledges that Acton is wealthy, and that wealth is 'a great item in his favour. I am terribly candid'. Then she reflects on her own words, and wonders 'in what manner he [Felix] really understood her'. The narrator explains that 'There were several ways of understanding her: there was what she said, and there was what she meant, and there was something between the two, that was neither'<sup>50</sup> (p.133). The first, which limits itself to language and overlooks the speaker, is 'aesthetic monism'. The second, which foregrounds the speaker's intentions and sidesteps language, is 'psychological monism'. The third, which is either both or neither, is 'dualism'.

Eugenia's 'dualism' is emphasized from the very beginning. In Chapter One, the narrator says that her brother Felix 'understood often both what she said and what she did not say' (p.15). This is endorsed at the end of the chapter, where she is reported about to say something, but she suppresses it and articulates something different. The narrator describes her discourse, saying, 'nothing that the Baroness said was wholly untrue. It is but fair to add, perhaps, that nothing that she



said was wholly true' (p.51). But her 'stylization' is given credit in Chapter Three, when she wants to know who is more beautiful: Gertrude or Charlotte. Felix, who is in love with Gertrude, tells her that Charlotte is prettier. The Baroness guesses: 'I see. You are in love with Gertrude' (pp.32-33).

Exactly as she sees the overt and the covert in Felix's discourse, he is also aware of her 'dualism': 'His sister, to his spiritual vision, was always like the lunar disk when only a part of it is lighted. The shadow on this bright surface seemed to him to expand and to contract; but whatever its proportions, he always appreciated the moonlight' (p.132). Of course, moonlight itself is dualistic. However, if Eugenia is a problem for Felix, she will be more problematic for the Wentworths. Indeed, these feel that she is always 'attired, intellectually, in gauze and spangles' (p.41).

If 'dualism' is the character's ability to be two in one, 'psychological monism' is the opposite. Hence transparency becomes the inevitable mode, as is the case of Mr. Brand: 'Felix thought him very transparent, and indeed he was so; he could neither simulate nor dissimulate' (p.139). Like their minister, the Wentworths are epitomes of nudity, and their exposure is projected all over the place. Their house has no privacy whatsoever: the windows are uncurtained, the doors are always wide open, and the walls are totally stripped off: 'the front door of the big, unguarded home stood open, with the trustfulness of the golden age' (p.23). By contrast, the moment



Eugenia lodges with the Wentworths, she introduces a number of dualistic devices: curtains and appointments, which makes her house as enigmatic for the Americans as is her discourse.

If the Wentworths mean one thing, and Eugenia means two, Felix's language is meaningless. His discourse is paradigmatic of the 'aesthetic monism': 'a license to say everything' (p.101; Felix's words). Moreover, he himself prescribes the 'aesthetic consciousness' as a remedy for Clifford Wentworth. No wonder Felix, the Bohemian artist, is the most voluble in the novel, which makes him, as Eugenia feels, 'a highly successful comedian' (p.130). This puts into perspective his continuous preaching about the necessity of 'amusement', and his relationship with Gertrude. Once, he tells her that there will come a time when she has to take him seriously: 'when I make love to you, you will have to think I mean it'. She replies, 'I shall never think you mean anything ... You are too fantastic' (p.101). Gertrude is basically right, for a comedian cannot be taken at his word. But she does not know that Felix is simulating the 'aesthetic monism', in the same way as he is orchestrating the comedy within the novel. The moment the comedy is over - throwing Charlotte and Brand together, juxtaposing Acton and Eugenia, having Clifford cured, and painting everybody including Mr. Wentworth - he changes gear and gets married. This makes him a proto-type of Nick Dormer in The Tragic Muse (both are artists).

The three stylistic categories are given more focus after Clifford's dismissal from college. The way the father describes

his offence, the remedy Felix prescribes, and the role Eugenia plays, perfectly exemplify the triadic discourse in James. Though the offence is drinking, the father finds it difficult to name. He struggles with words, and stammers to the extent that the reference of his speech suggests a real scandal: 'he was too fond of something of which he should not have been fond. I suppose it is considered a pleasure' (p.90). Language is problematic for Mr. Wentworth because he takes it seriously, and sees the reference or the signified only. The word that expresses something immoral is itself immoral, and is apt to besmear the speaker (style as identification).

Having heard of the problem, Felix decides to cure Clifford. He asks Eugenia to play a role in his therapeutic comedy. The fluency with which he speaks to his sister confirms that, unlike Mr. Wentworth, Felix sees the signifiers, not the signifieds; and heeds the sound of words, not their substance. He says to Eugenia: 'Encourage Clifford to come and see you, and inspire him with a taste of conversation ... Make him a little more serious. Even if he makes love to you it is no great matter' (p.94; my emphasis). Eugenia plays her role, but she does it her own way (dualism). While playing, she plans to marry Clifford. The irony is that she has not only cured him of drinking, but of 'psychological monism' too.

Clifford sloughs off his primitive one-sidedness, and his blushing and trembling disappear. For the first time, he sees through Eugenia's discourse: 'Clifford thought it so comical that he should know - in spite of her figurative language -

what she meant, and that she should mean what he knew, that he could hardly help laughing a little, although he tried hard' (p.111). Hence he turns down her offer. Two pages later, he demonstrates that he himself has become 'dualistic'. Instead of informing Lizzie about Eugenia's character, he covers up his knowledge, and formulates the observation interrogatively: 'Do you think everything she [Eugenia] says ... should be taken the opposite way?'. Not only does he manage to misrepresent what he wants to say, but to suppress it altogether. After knowing that Lizzie is aware of Eugenia's 'deception', he feels like commenting that 'the Baroness must desire greatly to bring about a marriage between Mr. Clifford Wentworth and Miss Elizabeth Acton; but he resolved on the whole to suppress this observation' (p.113).

What Clifford says to Lizzie anticipates Biddy's questions to Peter about Miriam Rooth in The Tragic Muse. As will be seen in Chapter Three, Carteret speaks like Mr. Wentworth; Julia, like Eugenia; and Nick, like Felix. These two artists, like Hudson, are voluble. But unlike him, they can manipulate language, create designs, and contain the others with the power of their own fiction, which represents the maturing of the Jamesian character from an auxiliary into an author-thinker.



- <sup>1</sup>See R. Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in Image, Music, Text (London, 1982; first published, 1977), pp. 142-8.  
(Barthes argues against all kinds of monologism, or attributing anything to the author: 'To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing', p. 147).
- <sup>2</sup>R. Poirier, The Comic Sense of Henry James: A Study of the Early Novels, second edition (London, 1967), p. 9.
- <sup>3</sup>See J. Bayley, The Characters of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality (London, 1960).
- <sup>4</sup>L. Bersani, 'The Jamesian Lie', Partisan Review, 36 (1969), 53-79 (p. 65).
- <sup>5</sup>M. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Theory and History of Literature, 8 (Manchester, 1984), p. 5.
- <sup>6</sup>see I. R. Titunik, 'The Formal Method and the Sociological Method', in V. N. Voloshinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language (New York, 1973) pp. 198-9.  
( 'In homophonic structure, "whatever the types of discourse employed by the author-monologist ... the author's intentions must dominate and must constitute a compact, unequivocal whole" ... In polyphonic structure, the other voices in the text come into their own ... they acquire the status of full-fledged verbal and conceptual centers, whose relationship, both among themselves and with the author's voice, becomes intensely dialogic and not susceptible to subordination to "the verbal-conceptual dictatorship of monologic unity of style and tone"'. )
- <sup>7</sup>Leon Edel, 'Introduction' to Roderick Hudson (London, 1961), pp. 5-17.  
( 'James crams into this book nearly all the great subjects and types he will later learn to use more economically', p. 16. )
- <sup>8</sup>John Scherting, 'Roderick Hudson: A Re-evaluation', Arizona Quarterly, 25 (1969), 101-19 (p. 102).  
(Scherting summarizes the critical debate: 'The pattern of critical opinion is fairly consistent: Rowland Mallet is regarded as a positive or at worst, a neutral factor in the fate of Roderick Hudson. Secondly, the cause of Roderick's disintegration as an artist and as a man is attributed almost exclusively to his weakness of will, a basic character defect', p. 101).
- <sup>9</sup>'Roderick Hudson: A Re-evaluation', p. 118.
- <sup>10</sup>W. D. Howells, 'The Tragic Muse and the New Novel', in Critical Essays on Henry James: The Early Novels (Boston, Mass., 1987), pp. 66-8 (p. 67).
- <sup>11</sup>See P. J. Conn 'Roderick Hudson: The Role of the Observer', Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 26 (1971-2), 65-82.  
(Conn quite rightly argues that Rowland Mallet 'cannot be regarded as a personified surrogate for James's moral imagination', p. 66; my emphasis.)
- <sup>12</sup>P. Weinstein, Henry James and the Requirements of Imagination (Cambridge Mass., 1971), p. 24.
- <sup>13</sup>See 'Roderick Hudson: The Role of the Observer', p. 69.  
(Peter Conn points out that 'even when Rowland Mallet does watch others ... his "vision" acts importantly to alter the observed "fact"', p. 69.)
- <sup>14</sup>See Henry James and the Requirements of Imagination, p. 22.



(Weinstein suggests that 'The parasitic elements in Rowland's "design" must be neither exaggerated nor obscured', p.22.)

15 The Comic Sense of Henry James, pp.11,12.

(Poirier arranges the characters into types: 'Roderick talks like the Young Temperamental Artist; Mrs. Light, like the Young Suffering Mother; Mr. Leavenworth, like the American Millionaire Abroad', p.11. This typology fits his 'melodramatic' focus, but it misses the dialogism of the novel.)

16, "Introduction" to Roderick Hudson', p.12.

17 Anonymous, 'Roderick Hudson: James, the Schopenhauer of Modern Fiction?', in Critical Essays on Henry James: The Early Novels, pp.35-6.

(The article, first published in October 1879, argues that all the characters fail; yet Mallet is 'quiet, generous and unselfish', p.35.)

18 It may be said that Mallet's problem is not having two irreconcilable narratives, but having a single narrative which he cannot split into two. However, the Preface, the text, and James's practice in general - the concept of 'cases', for instance - confirm the duality, and the duplicity, of what Mallet is doing.

19 Richard Poirier believes that Mallet, 'out of love for Mary, feel[s] even more responsible for the emotional as well as the artistic security of Roderick', p.13.

20 See Sacvan Bercovitch, 'The Revision of Rowland Mallet', Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 24 (1969), 210-21.

(Bercovitch compares the first edition of Roderick Hudson (1875) to the New York Edition (1907), and concludes that any comparison between the two 'reveals unmistakably that James meant to draw attention to Rowland's perverse willfulness, to the self-deluding rationality and narrow self-involvement that underlie his "solemnity" and circumscribe his intelligence', p.211.)

21 As will be seen in Chapter One of the thesis, the entanglement of the two narratives anticipates what the narrator of The Aspern Papers goes through in his attempt to manipulate Tina without falling in love with her.

22 See Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, New Accents, (London, 1981).

(Jackson's description of the mechanism of fantasy is illuminating. Fantasy either manifests desire or casts it out. Mallet's performance exemplifies the two.)

23 Mallet's language resembles Mrs. Light's. The latter talks about having created and launched Christina: 'if my daughter is the gifted creature you see, I have some of the credit of the creation' (RH, p.284). As a foil narrative, Mrs Light's lends meaning to Mallet's. The clearest example is the way both try to finish their sport with their creatures: exposing the detrimental information they have been hiding from the beginning.

24 Henry James and the Requirements of Imagination, p.21.

(Talking about the Coliseum scene, in which Mallet stands above Hudson and Christina, Philip Weinstein says that that position 'suggests a watchful god or a stage manager'.)

25 Mallet's quest for a role is important. The epithet 'useless'



(pp.,2,4,6) signifies both his potential and his present moment. He is 'the first unoccupied man' Mary has seen (p.75). His uselessness comes full circle in the end, for his life goes back to square one: 'as void and blank and sinister as a theatre bankrupt and closed' (p.526).

<sup>26</sup>See Lyall H. Powers, Henry James and the Naturalist Movement (Michigan, 1971).

(Mallet's main characteristics, patronization and chivalry, are represented as deeply rooted in his forebears, which foregrounds the naturalistic discourse of the early James. Powers' is an invaluable reference.)

<sup>27</sup>M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, fifth edition (New York, 1988; first published, 1941), pp. 49-50.

(In contrast to 'sympathy' or 'feeling along with', 'empathy' suggests 'feeling into', 'identification', 'projection' and substitution.)

<sup>28</sup>Virginia Fowler, Henry James's American Girl: The Embroidery on the Canvas (Madison, 1984), p.58.

<sup>29</sup>H. James, Washington Square (Oxford, 1982), p.17.

<sup>30</sup>For the development of the Jamesian heroine from object to subject, and from a victim of signification to a manipulator of discourse, see Henry James's American Girl; and Elizabeth Allen, A Woman's Place in the Novel's of Henry James (London, 1984).

<sup>31</sup>For the intertextuality of Roderick Hudson, see Paul Newlin, 'The Development of Roderick Hudson: An Evaluation' Arizona Quarterly, 27 (1971), 101-23.

(He focuses on the possible sources of the novel, and mentions the story of the French artist Henri Regnault, L'Affaire Clemenceau by Alexandre Dumas fils, Balzac, Turgenev, and Hawthorne's The Marble Faun.)

<sup>32</sup>'Introduction' to Roderick Hudson, p.16.

<sup>33</sup>Kenneth Graham, The Drama of Fulfilment: An Approach to the Novels (Oxford, 1975), pp. 35, 36.

<sup>34</sup>T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism: A Reader, edited by D. Lodge (London, 1972), pp.71-7 (pp.71-2).

<sup>35</sup>For Bloom's criticism of Eliot, see The Breaking of Vessels (Chicago and London, 1982), pp.17-21.

(In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', 'Eliot was deceiving us. He could not have been deceiving himself', as his review, 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry', published in 'the July 1919 issue of The Egoist', makes clear.)

<sup>36</sup>W. J. Bate, The Burden of the Past and the English Poet (London, 1970), p.3.

<sup>37</sup>The Burden of the Past, p.82.

<sup>38</sup>W. James, Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some Life's Ideals (London, 1908; first published, 1899), pp.48-9.

<sup>39</sup>Talks to Teachers, p.54.

<sup>40</sup>V. Leitch, Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction (New York, 1983), p.139.

<sup>41</sup>H. Bloom, A Map of Misreading (New York, 1975), p.93.

<sup>42</sup>Anna Freud, The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence (London, 1979), p.14.

<sup>43</sup>The etymology of 'daemonization' is also Jamesian. In the Preface to The Spoils of Poynton, James uses the epithet 'demonic' to distinguish his 'free spirits' from his



'fools', or those with intensities from the others with fixities (AN,p.129). The epithet is repeatedly used by James in reference to the artist in himself, and to his characters such as Maisie, and George Corvick.

<sup>44</sup>For the definition of the ratios see Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (New York,1973), pp.14-16.

<sup>45</sup>see D.T. O'Hara, The Romance of Interpretation: Visionary Criticism from Pater to de Man (New York,1985); P. de Bolla, Harold Bloom: Toward Historical Rhetoric, Critics of Twentieth Century (London,1988); and G.H. Hartman, 'War in Heaven', in The Fate of Reading and Other Essays (Chicago and London,1975).

(O'Hara suggests that the anxiety of influence represents Bloom's wrestling with Nietzsche; de Bolla focuses on Bloom and Derrida; Hartman argues that it is Bloom's war against Frye and Freud.)

<sup>46</sup>J.C. Rowe, The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James (London, 1985), p.46.

<sup>47</sup>The Anxiety of Influence, p.26.

<sup>48</sup>H. James, The Question of Our Speech, The Lesson of Balzac: Two Lectures (Boston and New York,1905), p.10.

<sup>49</sup>D.W. Smit, The Language of a Master: Theories of Style and the Late Writing of Henry James (Carbondale and Edwardsville,1988), pp.16-7.

(The three terms - psychological monism, dualism and aesthetic monism - are taken from the same book, pp.16-18; for Bakhtin's terms, - style and stylization - see Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, pp.181-204).

<sup>50</sup>H. James, The Europeans (London,1982; Penguin edition, 1964; first published,1878), p.133.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Aspern Papers: A Realistic

### Deconstruction of Romance

The Aspern Papers is a triumph of 'realism' over 'romance', observation over invention and integrity over playfulness. 'Romance', as a 'disengaged, disembroiled' experience finds itself 'encumbered' and over-reached by realism (AN, p.33). But this is accomplished only after reality rises from muteness to manipulation; object to subject, and achieves 'a transfer of process from the signified to the signifier, from the material to the work on the material', as Raymond Williams puts it.<sup>1</sup> The importance of this shift is that it is done polyphonically. James muffles his authorial voice, and represents his *dramatis personae* as delegates in charge of the narrative arena. These characters are, as Bakhtin says, 'not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse'.<sup>2</sup>

This representation of the characters as author-thinkers is undoubtedly the major preoccupation of The Aspern Papers. Some critics have totally missed it, but others have, in their own ways, come close to it. Indeed, the critical reception of the novella can be categorized into three sections: the existence of papers, the genesis of the story, and the narrator's performance. Jacob Korg, for instance, concentrates on whether or not the papers themselves exist, as if the text were a non-fiction documentary. He says, 'The narrator ... thinks the old lady ... possesses a thick bundle of valuable



letters ... but an attentive reading of the story fails to supply evidence to support him'.<sup>3</sup> Korg is clearly asking the wrong question. What he misses is that the importance of the papers does not arise from their existence, but from their absence, a concept studied in detail by Todorov.<sup>4</sup> It is the absence of these documents, and the search for them, that engender the narrative and make the novella what it is. Similarly, Laurence Holland, in contrast to his important theoretical discourse in The Expense of Vision, digresses from the text, and concentrates on the genesis of the story, as if The Aspern Papers were still that single page in James's Notebooks.<sup>5</sup>

Both critiques sidestep the work itself. Korg, by negating the existence of the papers, denies the author his 'starting-point', and the novel its 'raison d'être'. And Holland renders the novella redundant by reducing it to its spring-board. Other critics devote their efforts to the poet, Aspern, and to what he symbolizes outside the novella. John Carlos Rowe, for example, believes that James has created Aspern to inject the thin American culture with tradition.<sup>6</sup> All these critics go against one of James's major principles of composition: that criticism 'must grant the artist his subject, his *donnée*: our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it'.<sup>7</sup>

Hence the critics who concentrate on what James makes of his *donnée* come closer to the crux of the novella. These, as will be seen, focus on the narrator's performance and, quite



rightly, call him a historian and an authorial surrogate. But by limiting themselves to the narrator they have skated over the polyphonic structure of the text. They have consistently sidestepped Tina, and failed to come to grips with her authorial position. This blindspot may be blamed on the quality of Tina's fiction-making: it verges on the loss of representation. Once this is opposed to the conspicuousness of the narrator's surrogacy, it becomes clear why critics have expended their efforts on him only. But there is a more important reason for this monologistic reduction of the polyphonic work to the single voice of the narrator. It is the conventional handling of some of James's terminology.

James speaks of 'observer', 'reflector', 'register', and 'centre of consciousness'. Critics take the singular form for granted. But what has been always required, if James's works are to be seen in their proper perspective, is the pluralization of the previous terms, as John Goode points out. He argues that James 'seems to make quite elementary mistakes: he talks, for example, of The Portrait of a Lady as though it were entirely structured around Isabel's consciousness, apparently forgetting the brilliant interplay between her introspections and Ralph's, and the direct insights we get into an Osmond totally unknown to Isabel'.<sup>8</sup> And we could, indeed, add Madame Merle, Caspar Goodwood, Lord Warburton, and the rest of the characters. For the reader is supposed to focus on the way the characters handle their own stories, the conflicting plots they create, and the differing styles in

which they relate to each other. In short, a Jamesian character is to be studied as if he or she were an author at work, in accordance with James's polyphonic narrative mode.

The thesis of this Chapter is that The Aspern Papers is in this sense a polyphonic work. The narrator sees himself as being in charge of his narrative, yet Tina Bordereau is not the witless, innocent 'homebody' claimed by the narrator; and by the critics who play into his hands. His 'romance' clashes with her realism. He tries to manipulate her, while she endeavours to disarm him by accommodation. The narrator's enterprise fails, as Tina burns the papers and dismisses him. But this ending is made possible only after the narrator's project has been 'deconstructed'. The vehicle of deconstruction, as will be demonstrated in detail, is semiotic.

The first author-character in The Aspern Papers, then, is the anonymous narrator, whose story may be summarized as this. He hears of the existence of some literary documents belonging to the poet, Jeffery Aspern. But they are in the possession of two old spinsters, aunt and niece, living in Venice. So, being a publisher, he goes there, lodges with the Misses Bordereau, and 'composes' the narrative that may justify his objective, and bring it to a successful conclusion. First of all, he allies himself with what approaches an art-for-art's-sake conception: 'I felt even a mystic companionship, a moral fraternity with all those who in the past had been in the service of art. They worked for beauty, for a devotion; and



what else was I doing' (AP,p.43)? This point of departure entails, though the actuality may be different, a disengagement from reality, and a transformation of the narrator's life into a self-sustaining, self-reflexive narrative. He is undoubtedly conscious of such a corollary: 'I foresaw that I should have a summer after my literary heart' (AP,p.42). Put differently, his project will be a strategic vacuum where wit and gaming dominate, and where material things cease to matter, as he discloses to his ficelle, Mrs. Prest: 'If I had to choose between that precious solution [to the riddle of the universe] and a bundle of Jeffery Aspern's letters I know indeed which would appear to me the greater boon' (AP,p.5).

Not only does the narrator hold a bundle of papers dearer than the riddle of the universe, as he says, but he beholds the artist as a god of that universe too. This mythologization occurs when Mrs. Prest belittles the importance of Jeffery Aspern. The narrator rejoins, 'I took no pains to defend him. One doesn't defend one's god: one's god is in himself a defence' (AP,p.5).<sup>9</sup> Such an attitude illuminates the narrator's unrealistic approach, and his predilection for 'romance', in the heaven of which Aspern 'hangs high... for all the world to see, he's a part of the light by which we walk' (AP,p.5). Apart from the pun on 'hangs', the last clause, 'the light by which we walk', points to a specific discourse: the 'etherealization', and perhaps the 'etherization' of the novel, as Mary McCarthy puts it.<sup>10</sup> Propositions become 'premises'; ideas, 'theories'; conspiracies, 'plots'; human beings,



'objects'; old people, 'antiquities'; and daily life, 'a stage'. A clear example of this is the narrator's view of Venice, which is rendered in theatrical terms:

The splendid common domicile, familiar domestic and resonant, also resembles a theatre with its actors clicking over bridges ... the footways assume to the eye the importance of a stage and the Venetian figures, moving to and fro against the battered scenery of their little houses of comedy, strike you as members of an endless dramatic troupe. (AP,p.140)

This process knows no impropriety, and justifies any design, such as reducing other characters to puppets. Ironically, the schism between the narrator's 'romance' and reality will widen at his own expense because, as will be discussed later on, he is not as disinterested as he claims. In other words, there is a contradiction between his first narrative, the quest for the papers, and his second one, the romance of spending a summer after his literary heart. This dichotomy will function as a deep-seated deconstructive medium and will undo the narrator's enterprise.

The fictitious perspective, as a rupture with the real, is intensified by the specific approach the narrator adopts. He self-consciously commits himself to 'romance', saying, 'My eccentric private errand became a part of the general romance and the general glory' (AP,p.43). He is impervious to any sort of attachment, for any relationship with others turns

automatically into an opposition. 'Romance', after all, is 'essentially individual', whereas realism is 'basically social', as Robert Hume says.<sup>11</sup>

Hence, the idealistic, even the solipsistic, dimension of the narrator's 'romance'. It begins as an idea, disengaged from realistic considerations, such as time and causality. For instance, the narrator gives the impression that his 'present', like Jeffery Aspern's, is 'nude and crude'. Consequently, the trajectory of his 'romance', being atemporal, coils upon itself and stays put in the domain of unreality. This reinforces his mythopoeic methodology - invocation and fabulation. These are two of the main features of 'romance', as Richard Chase explains: 'Being less committed to the immediate rendition of reality than the novel, the romance will more freely veer toward mythic, allegorical and symbolic form'.<sup>12</sup> Such processes apply to most of the narrator's actions. For example, when he reads Aspern's correspondence, he says, '"Orpheus and Maenads!" had been of course my foreseen judgement ... it struck me that he had been kinder and more considerate than in his place - if I could imagine myself in any such box - I should have found the trick of it' (AP, p.7).

The phrase, 'foreseen judgement', and other similar expressions, such as 'foretelling' and 'prejudging', do not signify, as their prefixes seem to suggest, a visionary capacity of the narrator so much as the romantic discourse itself, namely, the formation of attitudes before any contact with reality. This explains why the narrator, before undergoing

Aspern's experience, identifies himself with the poet, or fabulates himself into one, saying, 'the multitude today flocked to his [Aspern's] temple but of that temple he [John Cumnor] and I regarded ourselves as the appointed ministers' (AP, p.6). Likewise, this phrase, 'appointed ministers', provides a frame of reference for the narrator's discourse at his problematic moments. On such occasions, he keeps addressing himself to the god of the temple instead of confronting and comprehending reality. For instance, when Juliana's reactions mystify him, he resorts to that metaphysical methodology and consults Aspern: 'I had invoked him and he had come ... it was as if he had said: "Poor dear, be easy with her"' (AP, p.42).

Even towards the end of the novella, and despite the readability of things and the visibility of all the narrative trajectories, he still approaches the mundane via the extra-mundane. This occurs when Tina proposes marriage. He necromantically conjures up Aspern for consultation. The latter seems to say to him, 'Get out of it as you can, my dear fellow' (AP, p.133). This reading of feigned signs will be countered later on by Tina's use of the same technique. She invents a sign, attributes it to Juliana, and deciphers it in her own way. The point to underline here is the specific relationship between the narrator and his language.

The narrator's 'romance' entails either a total rupture with reality, or a Procrustean enforcement of it. For instance,



the Tina and Juliana he has in mind are not the characters interacting with him. They are projections. The irony is that Tina and Juliana will actually capitalize on his projections. They internalize them, wear them as masks, and give him the impression that they are really, as he thinks, the guileful aunt and the innocent niece. A comparable irony can be seen in a number of James's works, such as Daisy Miller and Washington Square.

The fixity of the narrator's attitude may be reinforced by the minor success he accidentally achieves, as in the case of anticipating Juliana's origin. He says, 'Cumnor had a theory that she had been a governess in some family... I on the other hand had hatched a little romance according to which she was the daughter of an artist, a painter or a sculptor' (AP, p.47). But the fact that Juliana happens to be an artist's daughter does not legitimize the narrator's methodology.

The argument of this chapter so far concentrates only on the narrator. It represents him as an author-thinker at work, with all the options of 'narrative discourse' at his command. Indeed, the author himself is rarely mentioned, which is what polyphony, after all, is about. Talking about Dostoevsky, Bakhtin says that 'In his works a hero appears whose voice is constructed exactly like the voice of the author himself in a novel of the usual type'.<sup>13</sup> This stance is emphasized by some critics, and significantly by Leon Edel. Talking about The Aspern Papers he says, 'James used his characteristic

technique, that of making his hero his own historian - writing his own story with such candour, and ingenuousness that he discloses his own duplicity' (LHJ, I, p. 806).

Edel takes such an attitude not to advance the polyphonic argument, but to exonerate James from the narrator's unethical performance; otherwise, James will be identified with his historian. Indeed, Holland claims that the narrator's immorality, the 'moral courage which risks corruption', 'fascinated' James.<sup>14</sup> Fascination, which recalls Bloom's 'election' and 'covenant', not only suggests the agreement between the author and the character, but risks reducing them from a polyphonic duet to a monologistic one. This is why Edel sets out to confirm not only that 'polyphony is embedded in James, but that it is his 'characteristic technique'. It is interesting that Wayne Booth takes the same attitude on the same grounds. He argues that James has made some changes in the revised edition - particularly in the narrator's immoral discourses - 'to prevent ... the kind of identification with the narrator, which, even in this "obvious" story might easily result from the narrator's position of command'.<sup>15</sup>

What Edel and Booth miss, however, is James's imaginative solution to the ethical problematic (something underlined by Richard Poirier in his Comic Sense of Henry James). The point is that, instead of being locked in the ethical by the ethical itself (handling it in the form of preaching, for instance), James transposes it into the aesthetic mode. To avoid being implicated by the malpractices of a *dramatis persona*, he



swerves from monologism, and represents that character as being in charge of the text, and accountable for it. The aesthetic formula becomes a narrative mode that applies not only to The Aspern Papers, but to most of James's fiction, as Joseph Ward points out: 'James's characters ... make the structures of the novels in which they appear'.<sup>16</sup> What Edel calls the 'candour' of the narrator has little to do with personal transparency or integrity, but with the reliability of the particular mode of composition as contrasted with other modes within the text.

To find out how the narrator sets about his authorial discourse, after his approach has been introduced, is to address his extemporizations. 'Extemporizations', in the plural, underlines the multiplicity of the narrator's designs, and their incoherence. In fact, their multiplicity exhausts him to the extent that one of the reasons for his ultimate failure is his running out of plots, so to speak. This effect is intensified by the fluctuation from one design to another, which feeds back into his romantic frame of mind. This is clear, for instance, in his collaboration with Cumnor, and 'romanticizing' to Tina. At the end of Chapter One, where the narrator decides to use a false name, he says to Mrs. Prest, 'John Cumnor will bombard me with letters addressed in my feigned name to the care of the padrona' (AP, p.14). His ficelle Mrs. Prest, whose role recalls Cecilia's in Roderick Hudson, warns him that the Misses Bordereau may discover his name and his collaboration with Cumnor. She explains that Juliana can 'recognize his [Cumnor's] hand' on the envelope (AP, p.14). But



he does not heed her precaution, and turns down what the folklorists call 'the helper's donation' (Don Quixote rarely listens to Sancho Panza).

At the same time, the narrator extemporizes another tentative plot, saying that he will make love to Tina. Mrs. Prest advises him to wait and see first, but he does not. No wonder he is shocked when he meets Tina. He characterizes her as 'a piece of middle-aged female helplessness' - certainly not the woman he desires to have a love-affair with (AP, p.126). But he instantly replaces the love-plot with another: warm interaction. In Chapter Two, he says, 'In Miss Tina at any rate a grateful susceptibility to human contact had not died out, and contact of a limited order there would be if I should come to live in the house' (AP, p.21). Waiting and seeing, or observation and certainty, are realistic devices that figure like taboos in 'romance'. Don Quixote, once again, never waits to observe what kind of confrontation he is facing. Therefore, he is disappointed after every adventure. It is clear that the narrator multiplies his micro-narratives within a very short time although the objective is the same. This process, high frequency within a short duration, contributes to his failure.

These instances demonstrate the fluctuation of his plot from love to mere sociability, or from a potential relationship to make-believe; and highlight their mutual incoherence. For the humaneness of the promised interaction loses its candour owing to the nature of 'romance' itself.

This is stylistically signified in the utterance above, 'and a contact of a limited order there would be'. The formal, decree-like formulation foregrounds the narrator's hauteur and hubris. A second inference is the unmasking of the narrator's ethics - little wonder he turns out a 'criminal' in the end. The dichotomy between ethics and enterprise is embedded in the approach itself. Richard Chase says that there is a schism between romance and rectitude since morality hinges on the validity and genuineness of representation, whereas romance is of its own nature mimetically 'insincere'. This explains why the narrator is, as Wayne Booth describes him, 'of a particularly insensitive kind'.<sup>17</sup>

The contradiction between candour and malice is deconstructive. How can a contact, for example, be 'human' and 'limited' at the same time? These two antithetical poles will deconstruct each other because, when magnified, the greatest point of 'humaneness' is love, and perhaps marriage, the signs of which are abundant in the text (this will be demonstrated in detail later on). But the extremity of the second part, 'limited order', is a total rupture of relationship. This contradiction substructures the whole affair and dooms it. The narrator likes to pull Tina closer to himself as an agent, and to keep her in his vicinity as a source of information, but he pushes her away as a lover, and dismisses her as a possible wife. Therefore, the closer she seems, the farther she really is, which puts paid to his own plotting.



Gradually, the narrator crystallizes his designs into two interconnected plots. One is an attempt to manipulate both Juliana and Tina. The other, which follows the failure of the first, aims at corrupting Tina and co-opting her as an agent against her aunt. The narrator projects the earlier plan as a romantic flower-affair and as an economic enterprise, declaring,

'I had to be consistent; to keep my promise that I would smother the house in flowers. Moreover I clung to the fond fancy that by flowers I should make my way - I should succeed by nosegays. I would batter the old women with lilies - I would bombard their citadel with roses (AP,p.45)

His attempt to ensnare the aunt and niece is encoded in the signifiers 'house', 'women', and 'their'. But whether or not he is going to succeed is determined by the technique itself, namely, the implications of the flowers. The significations of flowers range from romance, romanticism, to realism, that is, from adventurousness, love, to enterprise. The first two are harmonious with the narrator's second narrative, but conflict with his basic perspective. The third agrees with the primary narrative, but is antithetical to his pretended romance. This complexity will be enhanced by the uncontrollability of the chosen medium. For 'flowers', which approach what Roland Barthes calls the degree-zero, are open to a multiplicity of reading. Barthes says,

The Word, here, is encyclopaedic, it contains simultaneously all the acceptations from which a relational discourse might have required it to choose. It therefore achieves a state which is possible only in the dictionary or in poetry ...



and is reduced to a sort of zero degree, pregnant with all past and future specifications ... Each poetic word is thus ... a Pandora's box from which fly out all the potentialities of language.<sup>18</sup>

The possible association of flowers with evil occurs in The Portrait of a Lady, where Osmond's 'egoism lay hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers' (Chapter Forty-Two). This image is translated into action in The Aspern Papers. The narrator gives the Bordereaus flowers in the same way as a serpent gives poison. But the dialogic antidote is at work too, as the narrator's rhetoric itself demonstrates. The contradiction between 'smother' and 'flowers', 'batter' and 'lilies', and 'bombard' and 'roses' is deconstructive. These lexical permutations beautify and nullify each other. Ironically enough, by cutting and sending the flowers away the narrator actually uncovers the hidden serpent, that is, the more he acts and speaks, the more he reveals himself. An Arabic proverb says, 'Speak! One is hidden under one's tongue'.

The ambivalence becomes more complex when it relates to signification as such. The narrator thinks that he can recruit Tina by means of roses. He even concludes that he has won his 'suit', at some stage, by nosegays. But he falls victim to his own device, in the sense that it conveys a different message to Tina, and another to the reader. For example, when he says, 'I can't live without flowers', Tina comes 'nearer to him' (AP, p.18). Perhaps she reads in this utterance that love is a matter of life or death for him. He himself suggests a certain reading of Tina's movement: 'I had drawn her by an

invisible 'thread', namely, an emotional potentiality (AP,p.18). It remains to be seen whether he is pulling her, or whether she is giving him rope, as John Crowley says.<sup>19</sup>

The narrator also applies this 'degree-zero' device to the description of his own taste, saying, 'I live on flowers' (AP,p.22). But it is clear that, in addition to the simplicity of his taste, 'flowers' also encode different messages. They convey his love to Tina; otherwise why should she think of him as a husband? Moreover, if flowers are taken to symbolize 'women', as in Robert Burns' 'red rose', the narrator's previous utterance becomes a love-message to Tina, and a signification of his desperate quest for a woman. But the reader, whose perspective is more comprehensive than the characters', can go further in decoding the same sentence. If 'simplicity' is the narrator's intention, and 'love' Tina's reading, then 'femicide' and 'vampirism' can be the reader's own conclusion. Having established that 'flowers' symbolize females, the reader reads 'I live on flowers' as 'I subsist on women'; for such a reading is indeed endorsed by the novella itself. The narrator not only causes Juliana's death, but wants to exploit Tina as well. He himself, in a deconstructive sense, narrates his own crime, as Peter Brooks confirms: 'The narrator of The Aspern Papers ... tells the story of his own crime while intending to tell that of a detection.'<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, the reading of 'live on' and 'vampirism' is encoded in the narrator's description of his profession. He makes clear to Juliana that he does not write about people at



random. He chooses 'the great writers' mainly - the great philosophers' and 'poets of the past' (AP, p.89). He picks 'the choicest individual or individuals' - another meaning of 'flower' according to OED. In short, he professionally feeds on the 'dead'. It is worth noting here that James repeatedly refers to art(ists) as flowers. In Hawthorne, for instance, he says, 'The moral is that the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep ... that it needs a complex machinery to set a writer in motion.'<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in 'Collaboration', in which a French artist and a German one decide to cross the national borders and to work together, Vendemer wonders 'What therefore are we to say to the brutes who wish to drag them all in - to crush to death with them all the flowers of such a garden ...' (CT, VIII, p.425). And in The Tragic Muse, Nick Dormer cannot understand why he should be an artist when no such 'flower' has been in his family before.

This reading of the narrator's discourse is called for by the ambivalence of self-stylization. He uses figurative language, playfully perhaps; but instead of unilaterally controlling the discourse, his rhetoric starts to backfire. It represents him as a 'smotherer', a 'bombarder', and a 'batterer'; and demystifies his flowery disinterestedness. Such a radical dialogism unmasks the narrator, and anticipates his final defeat at the Bordereaus' 'citadel'.<sup>22</sup>

A similar deconstruction takes place in the second part of the first plot, the economic enterprise. The narrator mistakes the Bordereaus' 'Cupidness' for cupidity - their readiness to



give the papers away for the sake of a husband, and their quest for money. Therefore, he concedes that he will pay the rent they require no matter how high it is, and embarks on a narrative of luxury: having a garden, a gondola, a servant, new furniture, and using money to commodify and reify others. He is rich enough to finance his projects, and to meet the requirements of his romance: 'so far as my resources allowed I was prepared to spend money, and my decision was quickly taken' (AP, p.28). The syntactic structure of the first half of this quotation is essential for understanding the function of money in this novella, and in James's other works as well. Money is the agent that makes the narrator's enterprise feasible.

But critics do not always view the function of money in James's novels as it is rehearsed and thematized. Edward Wagenknecht, for instance, claims that 'the logic of the situation obliged him [James] to set his people free from the ordinary and economic cares so that he - and they - might concentrate on the spiritual problems which are the main concern of his fiction'.<sup>23</sup> The fallacy of this claim arises from the fact that James's characters, the narrator of The Aspern Papers and Isabel Archer, for instance, cannot come into contact with 'reality' without money. It is money that releases them and sets them on the move in the mundane. Furthermore, a number of James's characters are motivated mainly by money, such as Morris Townsend, Gilbert Osmond, and the narrator of The Aspern Papers. Wagenknecht's attitude recalls Joseph Beach's. The latter believes that 'the people of James are mostly rich ... They are preternaturally free, living in a

moral vacuum'.<sup>24</sup> This equating of freedom with amorality is as false and wrong-headed as correlating slavery with fidelity and loyalty.

Unlike the two critics above, Maxwell Geismar claims that 'James thought the function of the artist was to teach the rich how to use their money better'.<sup>25</sup> If James's perspective were really didactic, it would stand more to reason to say that he does not want to preach to the rich, but to teach the non-rich. His novels would be rather manuals for the moneyless, such as the Townsends, the Niomies, the Osmonds, the Agneses, the Croys, and the Stants. Money, in James, as I see it, functions as a materialistic concept of freedom. It signifies that if freedom is not economically grounded, it remains a hollow deception. It is both intrinsic and extrinsic; material and immaterial.

Catherine Sloper, for instance, crippled by her pecuniary powerlessness, remains in a sort of narrative numbness until the death of her financial master, her father. Then she inherits the money, becomes free, and 'writes' the denouement of the novella. Similarly, Tina feels fully free only after acquiring a large sum of money, ironically from the narrator himself. This new position enables her to dismiss him and to round off the narrative polyphonically, that is, with her own voice. Hence the similarity between her termination of the narrator's 'romance' and Catherine's dismissal of Morris Townsend.



Tina's success confirms the failure of the narrator's design. He plans to ensnare both women, but gets himself trapped. The flowers represent him as an excited lover, and the money, transferred from his pocket to theirs, weakens him, empowers them, and enhances the process of deconstruction. But before the change comes full circle, the narrator alters his first stratagem, and plots a new one, the objective of which is to puppetize Tina, and to make her antagonistic to her aunt. If he succeeds, she will be a passive agent performing the script he writes for her. In fact, he seems encouraged by his own characterization of the two women. He prejudges Juliana as a 'canny', 'sarcastic', 'profane', and 'cynical' old woman, whose 'adventurous youth' ... had somehow automatically outlived passions and faculties' (AP, p.71). Moreover, he views her as belonging to an 'extinct generation' and therefore she 'would die next week, she would die tomorrow' (AP, p.24). These assumptions tempt him to bait Tina. First, she may help him discover Juliana's weak defences, and secondly in the case of the aunt's death, she may foolishly hand him all the papers. Tina is, after all, 'witless' and 'artless', which implies that he is the opposite but, as will be demonstrated later on, this is not borne out by the narrative. Instead, we see the sophistication of the naive and the naivety of the sophisticated, which explains Tina's rise and the narrator's demise. The point is that the second stratagem, like the first one, is doomed to be deconstructed.

This plot is based on the earlier project of 'making love to Tina'. It starts with a sort of infiltration for obtaining



information. The narrator asks Tina, 'where is it one could take advantage of her [Juliana]?' (AP,p.36). Such an enquiry demonstrates the narrator's shallowness and his romantic folly. He should at least try to ascertain first whether or not the two women, who have been living together for decades, are divisible, and consequently, whether the proposed dismemberment is workable. But he persists in his plot and tries to fool Tina, whispering to her, 'Tell me this, please - has she got a portrait of him [Aspern]? They're distressingly rare' (AP,p.64). Deceived by Tina's muteness, he believes that he has managed to represent himself as an 'undesigning person', and that he has duped her into taking him uncritically. Therefore, he decides to disclose his real name to her, but not to the reader. He justifies this confession saying, 'I've sailed under false colours', and commenting, 'I felt now I must make a clean breast of it, must tell her I had given her an invented name' (AP,p.111). The sincerity of the second part is doubtful, especially in the context of the narrator's stratagems. Does he honestly want to 'make a clean breast', and demonstrate the 'candour' Edel attributes to him, or is it not the honesty of the deconstructive gallows?

In other words, is it not Tina, who has outmanoeuvred him into dropping his mask? It seems to me that the latter case is more probable, especially in the light of Tina's other devices. First, she manages to enact the image he makes of her, which gives him the apparent security of make-believe. His ensuing performance gives her access to his primary narrative. She skilfully capitalizes on this and manages to overpower him. In

respect of his name, for instance, he expects her to be mystified by the play of the fictive and the real. But she turns out more sophisticated by giving the real the garb of the fictive; and the old, the reception of the new. Of course, it can be argued that she gapes at the 'startling' and 'shocking' revelation. But this sudden reaction is justified on the grounds of what James calls dropping 'the historic mask', or what Malcolm Bradbury describes as the played-down fictiveness.<sup>26</sup> The way she handles the incident demonstrates her capacity for containing his fiction with her own. On the other hand, her seeing a new signified in an old signifier, and vice versa, is not unreasoned, for the name, as a sign, is relative and mutative.<sup>27</sup>

Missing this relativity makes some critics claim that Tina, by preferring the new signified, betrays a predilection for romance. Walter Wright characterizes her as 'intensely romantic'. That is not surprising, for Wright systematically sees things upside down. Not only is his Tina 'intensely romantic', but his narrator is 'brilliantly' realistic too. He says, 'The narrator-hero is brilliant, amazingly observing and convincing'.<sup>28</sup> This, significantly, occurs in his Madness of Art. Wright is playing into the narrator's hands, for he takes the latter's representation of Tina at face value. This is why he overlooks the possibility that she is self-consciously in charge of her own discourse, and that she simply wants to lock the narrator into his own romance. Keeping him in that false position will give her a vantage point and will turn the narrative in her favour. This is what is meant, at the



beginning of the Chapter, by the rise of reality to realism, a transformation which entails that Tina's discourse will comprise more stratagems, more self-consciousness, and more art. The point is that she never loses sight of the realistic, as her quest for marriage, her affinity with Juliana, and her bargaining all exemplify.

As a matter of fact, Tina never becomes the narrator, nor vice versa. They try to win each other, but not to exchange voices. It is true that he sometimes makes quasi-realistic utterances, but he immediately retreats from them. A clear example is his fascination with 'the queer air of sociability, of cousinship and family life which makes up half the expression of Venice', in which he transforms that realistic threshold into a theatrical stage in accordance with his habitual disengagement from the real (AP,p.139). Reality and realism are equally foreign to him. The terms he uses - 'sociability', 'cousinship', and 'family life' - are not his and cannot adjust themselves to his 'romance' without jeopardizing their true import. As Bakhtin argues, words 'cannot be assimilated ... it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker ... language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions, it is populated - over populated with the intentions of others'.<sup>29</sup> Hence the narrator talks of a 'plot', and Tina translates it into 'conspiracy' (AP,p.112). The effect is a clear example of dialogism.



These implications of the discourse lend meaning to the action of the novella. The narrator manoeuvres hard to metamorphose Tina through a process of demoralization. He tries to make her lie, spy, and thief for him, saying, 'I shan't ask you to steal for me, nor even to fib - for you can't fib, unless on paper' (AP,p.83). This statement, considered dialogically, reads as the opposite of what it says. It is an insinuation that Tina can perform all those acts he mentions. Perhaps the narrator has in mind the letter she has written to John Cumnor, in which she denies the existence of the papers. Her rejoinder, as will be quoted later on, is that the commission will make her immoral. She may modify her position, even be his helper, but not to the extent of categorical reversal. However, it should be stated that this attempt to demoralize Tina is not anomalous in the text. The narrator plans to apply the same to Olympia: 'I was on the point of saying [to Tina] that Olympia was probably corruptible, but I thought it better not to sound that note. So I simply put it that this frail creature might perhaps be managed' (AP,p.83).

The last incident has an important bearing on the polyphonic mode. The narrator's stopping short of talking unself-consciously about Olympia's corruptibility foregrounds self-consciousness: the inextricability of the creative and the critical activities. Daniel O'Hara refers to the 'post-romantic and post-Symboliste notion of "critical creation"', and considers Eliot's writings central to this tradition.<sup>30</sup> It is Eliot, who says that 'the larger part of the labour of an author in composing his work ... is critical labour; the labour

of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing'.<sup>31</sup> But this authorial self-consciousness, is not unproblematic, as Terry Eagleton unwittingly demonstrates. Eagleton underlines the importance of self-consciousness, and represents it as a revolutionary medium. Talking about Brecht, he says that it endows the audience with 'a multiple awareness of several conflicting modes of representation. The result is ... to prevent it from emotionally identifying with the play in a way which paralyses its powers of critical judgement'.<sup>32</sup> But when it comes to Henry James, Eagleton denies him that function of self-consciousness, saying,

'Knowing' - consciousness itself - is the supreme non-commodity, and so for James the supreme value; yet in a society where the commodity reigns unchallenged it is also absence, failure, negation. In 'knowing' the world is appropriated and lost in the same act. This finally was the contradiction which even Henry James was unable to transcend.<sup>33</sup>

Not only is this judgement unfair on James, but it is self-contradictory. Knowing is negation, and art, as Adorno argues, is 'the negative knowledge of the actual world'. But it is not merely 'failure' or 'absence', as Eagleton thinks, because it is not 'knowledge of nothing, non-knowledge ... [It] undermine[s] and negate[s] a false or reified condition'.<sup>34</sup> This is why Juliana, having become aware of the narrator's reality, denounces him; and why Tina burns the papers and dismisses the narrator from her life. Similarly, it is through self-consciousness that Catherine Sloper spurns her father's system and outmanoeuvres Morris Townsend. Annie Miller, too,



having probed the reality of her community, 'runs' her life in accordance with her own perspective. Despite Eagleton's statement, 'these author-characters do not 'lose' anything. Catherine Sloper is 'a winner, and so is Tina. Even Annie Miller is 'triumphant on a deeper level. Their success is made possible by self-consciousness, which endows them with the 'understanding of the complete pattern of relationships surrounding the central situation', as Joseph Ward says.<sup>35</sup>

Hence to categorize self-consciousness as a non-commodity is a misconception. If possession and marketability are the main criteria of a merchandise, awareness is not only a precious but a key-commodity. 'The "captain of industry"', as Richard Godden says, 'had to become the "captain of consciousness" if his accumulation were to survive'.<sup>36</sup> This is why the first property the narrator tries to dispossess Juliana of is her self-consciousness. He says, 'I can arrive at my spoils only by putting her [Juliana] off her guard, and I can put her off her guard by ingratiating diplomatic arts' (AP, pp. 11-12). And it is equally evident why he plays the benign to Tina. This stratagem is informed by the narrator's postulate that 'from the moment you were kind to her she depended on you absolutely; her self-consciousness dropped and she took the greatest intimacy' (AP, p. 75). The narrator appears to be giving the reader and Tina access to the primary narrative, while actually confiscating their self-consciousness.



This argument is already called for by the narrator's intention to 'make love to Tina'. His sentiment here is not love for its own sake but mesmerism through animal magnetism. Once approached in this way, the narrator's benignity, and sentiment can be seen as what they are: mere devices for possessing Tina's best asset, self-consciousness. The fact that it is an asset, or a commodity, is, ironically, emphasized by Eagleton himself in a different book. In The Function of Criticism, he underlines the existence of 'cultural commodification' and 'commodified culture', especially when 'the bourgeois principle of abstract, free and equal exchange is elevated from the market-place to the sphere of discourse, to petty proprietors of a commodity known as "opinion"!'.<sup>37</sup>

Eagleton's stance towards Brecht is just as applicable to James. In fact, the Jamesian polyphony is about the 'multiple awareness of several conflicting modes of representation'. The Aspern Papers is about 'realism' and 'romance'; The Tragic Muse is about histrionics, politics and art, as different modes of representation. The juxtaposition of the three genres prevents the reader's sentimental identification with the make-believe, and enhances his/her 'critical judgement'.<sup>38</sup> This arises from the double function of self-consciousness in James: masking and un-masking. The first can be seen in the narrator here, or Osmond and Madame Merle in The Portrait of a Lady, all of whom try to camouflage their true narratives. The second aspect enables other characters, such as Tina and Catherine Sloper, to demystify and deconstruct their antagonists' designs. As Ian Bell says, 'It is James's efforts

to deconstruct the novelistic pretensions of fiction that permit his work its proper access to the "real".<sup>39</sup> The true significance of the Jamesian self-consciousness is focused by its being ascribed to specific characters within a polyphonic context.

To demonstrate how the self-consciousness of this first-person narrator is manifested in the text, consider his creative extemporizations and critical asides. He is represented as being creative all the time. He does not, like characters in a monologistic composition, follow a ready-made design, or happen to be in a Procrustean narrative. On the contrary, he is confronted with a problematic and seeks to do something about it. This is why he problematizes creativity itself, and foregrounds the quest for novelization. This significantly occurs at the very beginning of the text, where he says, 'I was beating about the bush trying to be ingenious, wondering by what combination of arts I might become an acquaintance' (AP, p.3).

Creativity soon calls for the critical activity when there are two or more possible designs, as when the narrator ponders upon the best approach to the unapproachable Juliana. He says, 'If Miss Bordereau suspected me of ulterior aims she would suspect me less if I should be business-like, and yet I consented not to be' (AP, pp.41-2). Of course, his performance is not as simple as it looks. Here, even while playing the undesigning person in addressing the reader, he is also trying to fool that reader. He pretends that he has embarked on the



flower-approach, despite the business-like manner being a short-cut. But the reader knows that the business-like alternative is detrimental to the narrator. The Misses Bordereau will not tolerate more publishers or biographers into their premises. Therefore, his choice of the romantic approach is a last resort on the one hand, and a second narrative camouflaging the primary one which is about business. Ironically, by foregrounding the text as 'a fabula and a sjuzhet, a story and a stratagem, the narrator calls for the reader's self-conscious, and critical, approach.

This is evident in the narrator's 'critical' activity, as embedded in the text. His vocabulary comprises a veritable glossary of literary terms, such as 'design', 'theory', 'premise', 'romance', 'plot', 'irony', and 'point of view'. But critical activity here means simply the character's self-conscious analysis of his/her own creativity on the one hand, and the perception of the other character's authorial mechanisms on the other. Such an activity may not only educate and nourish the imagination, but it will safeguard it 'from the merely instinctual, the automatic, and the stupid', as Harold McCarthy argues.<sup>40</sup> The narrator, for example, often corrects himself in time, as in the previously mentioned example about Olympia's corruptibility. Similarly, commenting on a dialogue with Tina, he says, 'I asked her no questions, holding off by design from her life at home and the things I wanted to know' (AP, p.76). In other words, he articulates the deceptive mannerisms only to cover or ambiguate his restructuring



plays. As will be demonstrated, it is this intrinsic ambivalence, the signs betraying the stratagems, which engenders the undoing of the narrator's project.

This is the crux of the narrator's reflections on his own discourse, especially when miscontextualized or misapplied. When he puts his gondola at Juliana's service, for instance, he immediately comments, 'I had scarcely said this however before I became aware that the speech was in questionable taste and might also do me the injury of making me appear too eager, too possessed of a hidden motive' (AP, pp.26-7). It is clear how the narrator attributes the cause of the semantic or semiotic slippage to himself, as if he could have avoided it if he had tried; or as if language were completely controllable. But a second reading of what he says above demonstrates that this controllability is itself arguable. As long as words are unuttered, a speaker can alter his or her intended discourse; yet as soon as the signifiers are formulated, they themselves start to control the speaker. They go behind him, and betray his other narrative. This is encoded in the very syntax here with language as the subject and the narrator, 'me', as the indirect object.

In addition to this intrinsic deconstruction, the narrator and his language being at loggerheads, there is an extrinsic undoing performed by Tina and Juliana. They manage to 'put him off his guard' from time to time. The implicit reversal of their positions is registered by the narrator himself when he addresses Juliana's sudden change from passive inferiority to

active superiority. He says, 'I had descended on her one day and taught her how to calculate, and my almost-extravagant comedy on the subject of the garden had presented me in the light of a victim' (AP, p.88). Not only do the words, 'descended' and 'comedy', signify the narrator's 'romance' of superiority and playfulness but, in a dialogic way, they also signify the reversal of positions in the novella. This is again reflected in the syntax of the sentence. It starts with the narrator as subject, 'I had descended on her ... and taught her', and ends in his becoming an object; 'my ... comedy ... had presented me'.

Attention to stylistic semiotics is called for by the text itself, for the three characters are self-conscious about stylization. Bakhtin differentiates between style and stylization. The first stands for a word in a dictionary or a sentence out of context, and is related to the form of monologue. The latter describes the word in a sentence or the heteroglot utterance and thus relates to the mode of a dialogue. Style is monologicistic, for it is heedless of context; whereas stylization is a polyphonic, contextualized 'double-voiced discourse'. A reader who is not aware of these nuances will mistake one form for another. Bakhtin says. 'If we do not recognize the existence of this second context of someone else's speech and begin to perceive stylization or parody in the same way ordinary speech is perceived, that is, as speech directed only at its referential object, then we will not grasp these phenomena in their essence: stylization will be taken for style, parody for a poor work of art'.<sup>41</sup>



This differentiation, which is central to Chapter Four of this thesis, has an immediate bearing on the present text. The Aspern Papers is strewn with expressions, such as 'you talk like so and so', 'the way you talk', and 'I must speak differently'. Juliana, for example, criticizes the narrator's idiolect, saying, 'you talk as if you were a tailor', that is, he distorts, fragments, and re-constructs reality as a patchwork (AP,p.90). Similarly, Tina demonstrates the same kind of awareness when she justifies her discovery of the narrator's wealth. She says she infers it from 'the way you talked' (AP,p.32). The narrator himself recognizes the existence of stylistic differences: 'I ... came afterwards to distinguish perfectly (as I believe) between the speech she [Tina] made on her own responsibility and those the old woman imposed upon her' (AP,p.34). Stylization distinguishes one character from another, gives each access to the antagonist's primary narrative, and reveals the major preoccupation of the novella to the reader.

The narrator's discourse, to begin with, is a literary one, in the sense of being poetically tropological, syntactically complex, and semantically polysemic. He draws heavily on metaphors, as in 'This door would have to yield to the pressure when a mound of fragrance should be heaped against it' (AP,p.45). But most important is his predilection for hyperboles and epigrams. For instance, he views Aspern as a 'god'; his poetry as 'a temple'; and his biographers as 'appointed ministers'. This is why he does not worry about Aspern's immortality. 'One doesn't defend one's god: one's god



is in himself a defence' (AP,p.5). If the worshipper happens to be a woman, she need not justify her enslavement to Aspern: 'As if a woman needed an excuse for having loved the divine poet' (AP,p.6).

If this discourse is approached as a style, it is possible to say that it is part and parcel of the narrator's romance. But if it is looked at as stylization, it becomes clear that it has a dialogic function. Part of it pertains to the Misses Bordereau, and the other camouflages the narrator's reality, and protects him against the two women. In other words, since Juliana has been in love with Aspern, the literary style may be doubly appropriate, for it is likely to appeal to the lover's voice in her and to honour Aspern's memory as well. If this fails, as it does, the rhetoric may cover the narrator's tracks. In short, style says that he is simply talking to himself - a monologue. Stylization suggests that he is in a continuous implicit dialogue with the two women. Furthermore, the literary discourse helps the narrator give the impression of disinterestedness, as both Ian Bell and Richard Chase say. Bell points out that the function of tropes is often 'to disengage debate and substitute dogma for collaborating dialogue'; while Chase explains how it is in the nature of romance to ignore detail and evade communication outside its own terms.<sup>42</sup>

Once the two women see through his devices, the narrator's rhetoric comes into play as a substitute medium, and functions as a vehicle of domination and mystification. The objective is

to replace understanding with belief, and doubt with trust. For instance, when Tina complains that she does not believe the narrator because she cannot understand him, he replies: 'That's just the sort of occasion to have faith' (AP,p.61). What this means is that if she believes him first, she will understand later. This rejoinder recalls Dr. Sloper's manipulation of Catherine when he says to her, 'I don't ask you to believe it [his judgement of Morris], but to take it on trust'.<sup>43</sup> In both examples the speakers sidestep the question at issue, and allocate themselves a privileged status: they know what is beyond the addressee. Of course, winning in this case, for a short time though, is a matter of volubility, for dialogues in James, as Leo Bersani points out, represent a sort of power-structure. He says that a novelist like James, 'organizes talk in view of the multiple local efforts to redress the balance of power, to apply the always unstable pressures and counter-pressures which repeatedly and briefly subject the other to the speaker's control'.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, the narrator not only wants to subject the Misses Bordereau to himself, but views himself as subject: critic, biographer, historian, publisher, invader, campaigner, guardian and minister. He says, 'the sense of playing with my opportunity was much greater after all than any sense of being played with' (AP,p.42). The impact of this perspective is clear in the narrator's 'description' of Pasquale's lover: 'I afterwards learned that Pasquale's affections were fixed upon an object ... This was a young lady with a powdered face, a yellow cotton gown ...' (AP,p.41). It is clear how the term

'object' frames the narrator's representation of the other character: artificial face, and sickly sack sound like parts of a puppet.

This attitude towards Pasquale's lover is not anomalous, for the narrator sees the Misses Bordereau in the same way. In Chapter One, for instance, he represents them as living 'on very small means, unvisited, unapproachable, in a sequestered and dilapidated old palace' (AP,p.3). Apart from reducing the two names to a blurring pronoun, the narrator shifts from the descriptive 'unvisited' to the judgemental 'unapproachable', instead of 'unapproached'; and then he extends his statement to include the dwelling-place itself. This, indirectly, signifies an identification between the Bordereaus and the building. The effect is not a personification of the house, but a reification of the two women. It is not surprising that he represents himself as the 'Self' and the 'Centre'.<sup>45</sup> This stylistic discrimination culminates in the narrator's repetitive use of the first person pronoun, 'I':

I walked toward the back of the house. When I advanced halfway I stopped... I had been of necessity quite abrupt, but I strove at the same time to give her [Tina] the impression of extreme courtesy (AP,p.18).

Such a discourse may be a corollary of the first-person narration, but that does not fully justify the text's being so over-populated with 'I's'. This feature signifies the narrator's narcissism as well as his domineering and aggressive



character. But does he not represent Tina, on a certain occasion, in a commendable way, and doing that, does he not touch on the polyphonic? The reader may ask such a question having in mind the following,

She stood in the middle of the room, and her look of forgiveness, of absolution, made her angelic. It beautified her; she was younger; she was not a ridiculous old woman (AP, p.141)

To be a polyphonist, the narrator should, from a dialogic point of view, recognize Tina as another 'I' and another subject. Bakhtin, talking about Dostoevsky's dialogues, says, 'the opposition of one person to another person [is] as the opposition of "I" to the "other"'.<sup>46</sup> But the narrator does not approach this polyphonic level here. Tina's beauty and angelic appearance are not seen as characteristic of her. On the contrary, they arise from the way he likes to see her. He changes his mind concerning marriage and finds it possible 'after all'. Thus he starts to express himself differently (it is the 'I' not the 'eye'). This is syntactically signified by Tina's becoming an object in the sentence - 'her' repeated twice. Secondly, the narrator does not view her as 'young' but 'younger'. The comparative degree suggests that, for him, she is still an elderly woman or a piece of antiquity. Thirdly, instead of affirmatively saying, 'she was a wonderful woman', he formulates the 'expression' in the negative - 'she was not a ridiculous old woman'. The litotes says it all.

The narrator's discourse demonstrates that his stylization reveals his own reality, rather than Tina's. Indeed, only two paragraphs later he reverses his view. This time, having despaired of the papers, he sees Tina as 'a plain dingy person' (AP, p.142). The inconsistency arises from the narrator's constant distortion of reality so that it might fit his romance. In other words, the representation of other characters varies according to their agreement or disagreement with his ego. The only constant element in this fluctuation is the unreal. To use Judith Fetterley's words, the narrator either superhumanizes - Aspern as a god and Tina as an angel - or subhumanizes - the Bordereaus as objects - but he never humanizes.<sup>47</sup>

The narrator's 'romance' fails, we may say, because it is not genuinely adopted: it is not, as in Hawthorne, confined within a set of romantic boundaries. 'Romance' here functions as a mask unfit for the narrator's face, and is therefore deconstructible. But is this deconstruction avoidable or inevitable? The answers continue to be semiotic.

A semiotic reading is not enforced upon The Aspern Papers. As we have seen, it is the frame of reference for the whole text, and it is foregrounded by the characters. The novella is constructed from the semiotic communication and cognition between characters foreign to each other. The narrator has very little information about the Bordereaus, and his only access to them is through their discourse and demeanour. Similarly, Tina and Juliana, who literally know

nothing about the narrator, can fathom his reality, and find out what kind of tenant he actually is, by approaching him semiotically. Moreover, the term 'sign' is repeated twelve times in the text (pp. 25, 34, 36, 44, 48, 70, 87, 117, 120, 122, 129, and 134), and 'signify' is used twice (pp. 27 and 31). In addition, the text is strewn with other synonyms and semiotically relevant terms, such as 'reading', 'note', 'mark', 'evidence', and 'interpretation'. More importantly, semiotics is thematized in the text as a strategy of encoding and decoding. In Chapter One, for instance, the narrator argues that one can 'make much of the internal evidence' (AP, p.12). He infers from Tina's letter to John Cumnor a strong relationship between Aspern and Juliana:

It [Mr.] proves familiarity, and familiarity implies possession of mementoes, of tangible objects. I can't tell you how that 'Mr.' affects me - how it bridges over the gulf of time and brings our hero near to me ... You don't say 'Mr.' Shakespeare (AP, pp.12-13).

The narrator is not only decoding, but is giving the impression that his way of reasoning is logical. This calls for the distinction between the narrator and the method. Semiotics, as a move from data to pattern, or premises to synthesis is ratiocinative, for it is similar to induction. But this does not mean that anyone using logic will be logical. What the narrator is doing here, for instance, is not as objective as it sounds. He is projecting his own desire upon the semiotic process; and is trying to read his own perspective into the text, instead of letting the text read for him. In short, he is



using and abusing semiotics. Hence, when his ego is sidestepped, his reading comes closer to the code, as occurs when he infers that Tina is not totally segregated from the social world of Venice. He justifies his reading by 'the natural way the names of things and people - mostly local - rose to her lips' (AP,p.60). Closer still is his decoding of one of Juliana's signs. Talking about Tina, Juliana says to him, 'She's a very fine girl' (AP,p.92). He decodes this utterance, asking, 'Did she by describing her niece as amiable and disencumbered wish to represent her as a parti' (AP,p.92)? This interpretation is indeed endorsed by the novella.

The narrator's semiotic attention is not limited to the hermeneutic reception of the Bordereaus' discourse. He occasionally reflects on his own, not because his words may betray him - he has nothing to be betrayed! - but because they may signify the 'wrong' messages to the Misses Bordereau. Commenting on one of his dialogues with Tina, he says, 'I had no wish to have it on my conscience that I might pass for having made love to her. Nothing less should I have seemed to do had I continued to beg a lady to "believe in me" in an Italian garden on a midsummer night' (AP,pp. 61-2). Apart from the fact that the narrator has already done what he theoretically deprecates, his statement encompasses a larger deconstructive repertoire. Signs can be 'verbal' - 'to beg', or contextual - 'Italian garden', and 'a midsummer night'. This suggests that the field of 'signs' is almost infinite. As Terence Hawkes points out,

nobody just talks. Every speech-act includes the transmission of messages through the 'languages' of gesture, posture, clothing, hair-style, perfume, accent, social context etc. over and above, under and beneath, even at cross-purposes with what words actually say. And even when we are not speaking or being spoken to,<sup>48</sup> messages from other 'languages' crowd in upon us

But how does the sign in this larger sense operate? Before answering, it is worth quoting what Terence Hawkes says about the semiotic mechanism. 'A sign', he explains 'stands for something (its object); it stands for something to somebody (its interpretent); and finally it stands for something to somebody in some respect (this respect is called its ground).'<sup>49</sup> Hence the semiotic sequel is a composite comprising an objective element, the 'sign', and a subjective constituent, the 'ground'. This combination generates an equivalent to what Catherine Belsey calls 'expressive realism', a proper state of balance between 'sign' and 'ground', as in Tina's interpretations.<sup>50</sup> But if the latter dominates, as in most of the narrator's readings, realism will slip into romance.

The attempt to 'monologize' the (polysemic) sign confronts the resistance of the 'other' in the word, which is, by and large, sidestepped by the narrator. The 'other' is always there. But the narrator's loquacity gives the impression that he thinks of language as if it were controllable. He will realize in the end that it is a mocking medium. To be successful entails that the narrator must comprehend the conventional codes relevant to his discourse, and have an accurate perception of their 'grounds'. And since the main



problematic in the novella is whether or not the narrator has given Tina any signs of love, his intimations to the reader are especially significant.

In Chapter Two, to begin with, he confesses that 'a curious little tremor...took me when I saw the niece not to be there' (AP,p.23). In Chapter Four, he reiterates the same attitude: 'for a long time I never saw her, and I wondered the common chances of the day shouldn't have helped us to meet' (AP,pp.39-40). The 'curious little tremor' and the pronoun 'us' may acquire more 'concretion', when love is brought into play. This occurs in Chapter Five, where the narrator juxtaposes his position with that of 'Romeo and Juliet'. He says, 'Juliana might on the summer nights of her youth have murmured down from opened windows at Jeffery Aspern, but Miss Tina was not a poet's mistress anymore than I was a poet' (AP,p.53). The negative formulation of this sentence does not nullify the possibility of a romantic affair. On the contrary, the two negatives make a positive: if they are not Shakespearean lovers, they can be un-Shakespearean ones. Perhaps he wants the new relationship to be a revisionist recasting of Shakespeare, as happens in The Tragic Muse. He does not like Tina to 'murmur down', but to 'murmur up' to him. This is why he asks her, as already quoted, to believe 'in' him, that is, to worship him as a god, exactly as women, particularly Juliana, worship Aspern.

These examples, along with others, enable the reader to know the narrator from within and without. Hence Leon Edel



says, 'The narrator may have told himself "I had not given her cause" - but the reader knows that he had. He had enlisted Tita [Tina] on his side from the first by cajoling and flattery' (LHJ, II, pp, 810-11). Similarly, William Stein emphasizes the same reading, saying, 'unwittingly inflamed by the passion for Aspern's papers, he [the narrator] has enacted the role of a lover in his intercourse with Tina'.<sup>51</sup> But both critics approach the issue as a matter of the 'character's intention' rather than through the semiotic logic of the text.

In Chapter Two, for example, when Tina reveals her quest for 'a man', the narrator rejoins, 'Why shouldn't I be the man ... I'll work without wages; or rather I'll put in a gardener. You shall have the sweetest flowers in Venice' (AP, p.19). It is not important, first of all, what the narrator intends, be that lure or intimacy, because the discourse has its own semiotic logic. The two signifiers, 'man' and 'gardener', for instance, demonstrate the ambivalence between 'ground' and 'object'. The former, 'man', signifies an unlimited range of possibilities, but without any focus on profession, be it publishing or gardening. This foregrounds the general signifieds of 'man', such as the lover and the husband, who work, as the narrator proposes, 'without wages'. The second, 'gardener', relegates the concept of 'man' and replaces it by that of the horticulturist. It is significant that the narrator identifies himself with the 'man' not 'the gardener'. More than that, he holds the second lower than the first, and allocates the topiary for him; whereas he himself will just send the flowers. This hierarchy is syntactically projected by

the gardener's being an object - 'I'll put in a gardener'. In short, this incident represents the narrator as a lover, or at least an admirer. The 'sweetest flowers' he will send to Tina second the reading; yet he tries to shrug off such an inference on the assumption that it is not self-consciously or intentionally in the text.

But the reader can envisage by now 'the logic of the text's language as opposed to the logic of the narrator's claims'.<sup>52</sup> The text substantiates the readings of Edel and Stein and confirms the narrative of love. At the end of Chapter Four, for instance, the narrator petitions Tina to keep him company, imploring, 'Don't hide from me altogether' (AP,p.37). When she grants him his request, he assures 'her there was plenty to do both' (AP,p.78). The word 'plenty' signifies a long period of co-existence, perhaps marriage. The narrator himself has already sounded such a note to Tina: 'I wish I might think I should bring you a little life' (AP,p.36). A 'life' for 'both' with 'plenty' to do 'together' cannot be but a matrimonial union. The narrator welcomes such a possibility in his dialogue with Juliana in Chapter Six. The aunt enquires about his outings with Tina. He replies, 'You speak as if we had set up the habit .... Certainly I should be very glad if it were to become our pleasant custom. But in that case I should feel a still greater scruple at betraying a lady's confidence' (AP,p.97). This rejoinder seethes with signs which please Juliana. The signifiers, 'our', 'pleasant', 'custom', 'betraying', 'lady', and 'confidence' suggest that a process of convergence is taking place.



Having received such messages, Tina starts her own composition of which the most controversial constituent is self-consciousness. Without this, there can be no authorship. Hence the first problem is to determine the nature and the degree of this authorial characteristic in Tina. Critics clearly differ about it. For some, Tina is a pathetic puppet, an epitome of stupidity or, at her best, an eleven-year-old child.<sup>53</sup> Other critics argue that Tina's muteness is enigmatic, and emphasize that her innocence should not be taken uncritically. Hence some call her a scheming woman.<sup>54</sup>

Both aspects of the critical reception of Tina are narrator-bound. The first, the negative approach, is framed by the narrator's representation of her; the second is informed by the reversal of that representation. Indeed the second group of critics are properly self-conscious about going against the narrator. For instance, Crowley says, 'To see her [Tina] accurately, the reader must discount the narrator's narrow and distorted vision and Tina must be judged by her words and actions themselves rather than the narrator's characterization of them'.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Barbara Jensen-Osinski believes that 'To find the "real" Tina, the reader has to depend solely on quotations from her; the narrator's own comments cannot be trusted'.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, they cannot be trusted, but they can be analysed. Each character is, consciously or not, a reflector, a register and a point of departure, as James reiterates, for the understanding of the rest of the



characters. In other words, discrediting the narrator's narrative should not blind the reader to its positive implications.

Put differently, at the heart of the narrator's art, the reader may find the proper point of departure for approaching Tina, as the following instances demonstrate. The narrator keeps repeating that Tina is 'artless', 'witless', and 'guileless'. Even toward the end of the novella, and despite the reversal of roles, he sticks to the same standpoint. After Juliana's death, for example, he describes her, saying, 'poor Miss Tina had had to manage by herself after the end. What did she know about arrangements, about the steps to take in such a case? Poveretta indeed' (AP, p. 121; my emphasis). These projections raise the very questions to be addressed. Is she really as unself-conscious as he says? Is she as unauthor-like as he represents her? Ironically, he himself charts a tentative answer, which contradicts his pejorative judgements, and signifies that Tina is enigmatic and undefinable for him.

His description of the mode of her bargaining after she is left on her own suggests a different verdict. He notices that 'her reasons appeared to come first and her feelings afterward' (AP, p. 137). This ability to fight down her emotions at the most critical moment implies self-consciousness. Accordingly, it is logical to infer that she can 'manage' her resources, take the suitable 'steps', and 'arrange' her paraphernalia. This knowledge, though, has not suddenly or epiphanically descended upon her. She is, in fact, self-conscious throughout the

novella as both Juliana and the narrator indirectly imply. The former informs the latter that Tina 'had a very good education when she was young' (AP,p.29). Juliana is not speaking about a degree or a course, but about 'education', which entails something formative and constructive.

The narrator himself suggests that Tina possesses such qualities when he says, while talking about her and her aunt's origin, 'You could never have said whence they came from the appearance of either of them; wherever it was they had long ago shed and unlearned all native marks and notes' (AP,p.46). The narrator's use of 'unlearning', which is more demanding than 'learning', echoes Juliana's choice of 'education', and suggests that the American rusticity is replaced by sophistication. Such a transformation is codified by Juliana's saying, 'We can arrange, we can combinare, as they say here' (AP,p.89). The sloughing-off process does not occur in the novella itself for the Bordereaus have already been in Europe when the story starts. It is in that period, which predates the novella, that Tina 'had acquired by contact', as the narrator notices, 'the trick of the familiar soft-sounding almost infantile prattle of the place' (AP,p.60). Indeed, she has acquired more tricks for the exploitation of apparent naivety, as the operation of her self-consciousness demonstrates.

In Chapter Two, for instance, when Juliana and the narrator agree to the rent, the former 'gaily cries', 'He'll give three thousand - three thousand tomorrow' (AP,p.29). The latter does not comment, but Tina, who is standing by, with



'her patient eyes turning from one' of them to the other, asks, 'Do you mean francs' (AP,p.29)? Juliana, directly, and the narrator, indirectly, ironize her; but despite that, her question turns out so important that the tenant and the landlady rediscuss the issue and agree to francs. The incident may appear parenthetical for some readers, but it seems to me functional. Tina's 'patient eyes' suggest that nothing is wasted on her and that, while the others marginalize her as if she were an object, she watches them and makes them her object of observation. Indeed, her eyes are doing the same kind of 'introjection' that Miriam Rooth's 'pocket-like' eyes do, as will be seen later. Barbara Jensen-Osinski confirms that Tina 'observes intelligently and deals sensitively' with her aunt and the narrator'.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, the incident foregrounds Tina's superiority to the other two. In Chapter Three, for example, the dialogue between Tina and the narrator displays that she possesses a comprehensive consciousness encompassing him and her aunt. The narrator wonders why Juliana insists on leaving more money for Tina. The latter replies, 'She [Juliana] thinks that when I'm alone I shall be a great fool and shan't know how to manage' (AP,p.35). This reveals that Tina is not only aware of how her aunt views her, but that she manipulates that image as well. Her use of the epithet 'great' clearly ironizes Juliana's standpoint. Similarly, when the narrator describes Juliana as a 'very proud' woman, Tina comments, 'Why, have you



discovered that 'already' (AP,p.36)? In other words, he is a belated discoverer of what she has 'already' observed and contained.

It is here that her craftiness 'rises' from potentiality to action.<sup>58</sup> Despite the narrator's belatedness and her superior perception, she plays the role he allocates her, and gives him the chance to revel in his trite revelation, and to betray himself more and more. Her own self-consciousness multiplies in this concern. She pretends to agree to his characterization of Juliana, foregrounds his being a discoverer, and avoids subverting any sketch he makes of them. This multi-levelled consciousness - monitoring, meditating, and masterminding - is also highlighted when the narrator asks her if Juliana suspects him of anything. Tina replies, 'I shouldn't think so - letting you in after all so easily' (AP,p.36). Such a rational reply - conclusion and premise - confirms her awareness of the whole pattern of relationships, and signifies that muteness does not mean mindlessness. Rather, it may signify 'volumes', as Dr. Sloper says of Catherine's silence, and as the plot will establish.

Her plot, or 'de-sign', consists of two parts: duality and disclosure. In the first stage, Tina manipulates the narrator's characterization of both herself and her aunt by pretending to be an 'undesigning' person, by offering him an agent to mastermind, and a fabula to construct. In Chapter Three, for instance, when he wonders how he can 'manage' in the new setting, she tells him, 'Perhaps you can't.' I don't see

- unless I should go with you' (AP,p.33). She is even ready to side with him, as in the case of the rent. When he pays her the first three thousand francs, she caresses him by complaining on his behalf: 'Don't you think it's too much' (AP,p.39)? She attributes that injustice to Juliana, and represents her aunt as undefeatable, unless, of course, she joins forces with him. 'Everyone can be managed by my aunt', she tells him (AP,p.83). And Juliana is 'very cunning', she adds (AP,p.84). It is clear that Tina is trying to bait the narrator by identifying herself with him. The corollary of this design is to turn him into a satellite floating in her orbit throughout the novella. Moreover, by pretending to be a reliable source of information, she has him beseeching her for more details and more anecdotes about the papers and Juliana's mystifying narrative. 'What I want from you', he begs her, 'is a general promise to help me' (AP,p.84). He adds, 'This is the main thing: to watch our friend carefully and warn me in time before she commits that dreadful sacrilege [burning the documents]' (AP,p.84).

This reversal of roles is not merely a reversal of the personal power-structure, but a dramatic deconstruction of the narrator's centrality. From now on, he becomes the acolyte, the agent performing the script Tina writes for him. She makes him believe in the existence of the papers, the craftiness of Juliana, the location of the documents, and holds him in suspense for more information and more manipulation. Her success is signified by the complete authenticity she has for him. Put differently, playing the 'witless' and the



'guileless', she manages to make her discourse 'verisimilar.' For example, when she tells him that Juliana has everything, he comments, 'These words caused all my pulses to throb, for I regarded them as precious evidence' (AP,p.78). In contrast to his romance, she offers him what Henry James offers American literature: realism.

While making believe that she is not making believe, she nonetheless injects the verisimilar with her true 'ground' - the quest for a husband. In Chapter Three, she lures him with her new pecuniary position, whispering that all the money will be hers. He says, 'you'll make me wish to stay here two or three years' (AP,p.34). Then she gives him a clearer sign of her objective: 'That would be very good for me' (AP,p.35). But as expected, he misreads the message, although 'me' signifies a personal 'ground' more emotional than economic. That 'personal' drive is enhanced by means of a different arrangement for the narrator's reception. The maid no longer receives the narrator, neither does Juliana. Instead it is Tina who always awaits him at the door as a (would-be) wife. This scenario effaces all the females except Tina so that the stage is set for Romeo and Juliet. But like Winterbourne's in Daisy Miller, the narrator's perception is limited to categorizing Tina's performance without establishing its significance. In other words, he beholds the frame without the picture, or the picture without the idea behind it. Henry James affirms that 'Every good story is of course both a picture and an idea, and the more they are interfused the better the problem is solved'.<sup>59</sup> John Carlos Rowe comments that a 'fundamental



weakness in James's characters is their inability to recognize the "idea" in the "picture", the cognitive determinants of a scene'.<sup>60</sup>

Such a defect is evident in most of the narrator's readings of Tina's encodings. When both stroll in the garden, for example, she makes use of the Shakespearean setting by 'insisting', as the narrator notices, 'on making the talk between us personal to ourselves' (AP,p.62). Although 'insisted', 'personal', and 'to ourselves' smack of matrimonial messages, the narrator fails to accommodate Tina's quest and, as usual, labels her demeanour as a designless daub 'possible only to a perfectly artless and a considerably witless woman' (AP,p.62). The case is contradictory to his calculations because Tina is self-conscious about 'personal', and 'collective'. She always uses 'we' when the affair relates to something impersonal, such as accommodation and living conditions. But she chooses the first-person pronoun 'I' when the discourse is a vehicle for the personal. This is why she tells the narrator 'I shall like the flowers better now that I know them also meant for me' (AP,p.62; my emphasis). Once again, despite the readability of her message, the narrator fails to come to grips with her stylization. It is as if her discourse were in a white language.

If his characterization of Tina, and his prejudgement of her capabilities prestructure his perception of her, the situation must be different when Juliana's discourse is at issue. This, likewise, arises from the way he views her. He

considers Juliana 'crafty', 'cunning', and 'a sarcastic profane cynical old woman' (AP,p.73). Consequently, he is expected to suspect her stratagems, and to contextualize her code to find out what they stand for. But before addressing this, I would like to make clear that Juliana is always collaborating with Tina, something missed by the narrator, and by most critics.

The clearest evidence is the affair of Aspern's portrait. In Chapter Four, the narrator asks Tina if the aunt has a portrait of the poet (AP,p.64). Then, unexpectedly, in Chapter Seven, Juliana 'unfolded the white paper and made a motion for me [the narrator] to take from her a small oval portrait' (AP,p.93). Taken together, the two incidents prove that the Bordereaus are co-ordinating their performance. The same applies to the vulnerability of the narrator's position as a lodger, and the possibility of terminating his tenancy. In Chapter Six, Tina tenderly suggests that 'it would be better for you [the narrator] to stay in some other house' (AP,p.78). Later on, Juliana repeats the same note, but in her own stylization, saying, 'Are your rooms too dear? If they are you can have more for the same money ... We can arrange, we can combinare, as they say here' (AP,p.89). It is clear how Tina and her aunt manipulate discourse (blowing hot and cold) so that the narrator will be in need of one of them, most likely Tina. One suggests leaving, the other talks about remaining in the vicinity. Interestingly enough, he chooses Tina's way: to stay put.



The narrator sometimes gives signs that he is aware of their collaboration, though not comprehensively. In Chapter Six, before Juliana speaks about the flower affair, he notices that 'Miss Tina sat down beside her aunt, looking as if she had reason to believe some wonderful talk would come off between us' (AP,p.69). The conversation that follows turns out to be interesting, reconciliatory and up to Tina's expectation. The 'reason' may be that she and her aunt have already planned the meeting and the scenario. Since he does not detect this, they pursue their method, with Juliana giving very transparent signifiers. She asks him to take Tina on excursions, and to 'make her' go, if she hesitates. 'Why don't you take that girl out', she suggests, 'and show her the place' (AP,p.73). The narrator feels that the use of 'girl' is a novelty, but he does not reflect on its significance. Even when he happens to read properly, he does not accumulate because he does not speculate or contextualize. This occurs in Chapter Seven when Juliana foregrounds Tina as a 'fine girl', who 'hasn't a relation in the world' except her aunt. (The term 'relation' is central to the ending of the novel, as will be seen later). The narrator, as already quoted, wonders, 'Did she by describing her niece as amiable and disencumbered wish to represent her as a parti' (AP,p.92)?

This is the limit of his perception. He does not reflect on Tina's position concerning that proposition. He never tries to find out whether the above instance is a trivial and transient suggestion, or a permanent perspective. In short, he is, as Robert Levine says, 'an inadequate reader', who comes



across very clear signs, but he either fails to decode them, or if he happens to guess properly, he sidesteps them.<sup>61</sup> In fact, a number of critics confirm his reading-myopia. Jacob Korg notices that the narrator's 'intelligence seems impervious to every detail that does not promise to lead him to the letters'.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Susanne Kappeler says, that the narrator's 'purpose is so fixed, and pursued with such obsession that an emerging rival plot escapes him altogether'.<sup>63</sup>

The point of the preceding argument is threefold. First, not only does the narrator fail to cover his tracks, to comprehend codes, but he does not penetrate the Bordereaus' discourses in such a way as to 're-write' them into a readerly text. Secondly, Tina and Juliana are co-authors of the same script, co-actors of one scenario, and collaborators for a single objective. Thirdly, the Misses Bordereau do not monopolize each other, neither do they attempt to puppetize the narrator. On the contrary, they recognize one another as individuals. Their independence is highlighted by their distinctive roles, and stylizations.

This puts paid to the monologistic viewpoint adopted by some critics, such as John Carlos Rowe, who claims that 'Tina is expressly under the rule of Juliana'. He adds, 'Given Juliana's need to provide some financial and familial protection for Tina after her death, the narrator's "character" seems already designed by the stage drama Juliana herself has set in motion'.<sup>64</sup> Rowe's reading is contradictory: it represents Juliana as a superior subordinated to Tina. But how can the

aunt be simply a matriarch when she so effaces herself for the sake of her niece? And how can Tina be written off as an underling when she plays her role so brilliantly and particularly after Juliana's death? Rowe's myopic approach is the corollary of his monologistic perspective, as already established, which yokes everybody to somebody. The affair, however, is polyphonic not only because of the Bordereaus' mutual relationship, but in the light of their attitude towards the narrator. They do not intend to possess or be possessed by him. Tina describes their future familial situations, saying, 'If you weren't a stranger. Then it would be the same for you as for me' (AP, p.133). The transactions between Tina and Juliana are not to be understood hierarchically; otherwise the reader will be no better than the narrator. If the two roles are contextualized, their polyphonic reality will crystallize. Jacob Korg comes closest to the point, saying, 'the niece, having found her own resources insufficient to ensnare him, has enlisted her aunt's help'.<sup>65</sup>

The point is substantiated by the dramatic change in Tina's plot. The first stage, mute duality, has failed to lead to marriage but it has scored numerous points, such as the intimacy between herself and the narrator, and laying bare his designs. Therefore, the second part of the plot, disclosure, becomes inevitable, especially that Juliana has died on the one hand, and Tina has acquired enough money to support her standpoint on the other. Most critics acknowledge this change, but they label it differently. Rowe calls it 'rebellion' which does not crush 'the constraints of ...



phallocentrism'.<sup>66</sup> Laurence Holland calls it 'liberation' and 'return to society'.<sup>67</sup> But both of them see it as the birth of Tina, that is, as if she had never existed before Chapter Nine. The fallacy of such judgements may be confirmed, ironically, by Rowe himself. He feels that the last Chapter is dominated by Tina, a fact that may subvert all his myopic critique; so he tries to juxtapose both poles, Tina's rebellion and her passivity, her education and her unself-consciousness. He confuses the whole construction, but the perplexity is his, not the novella's, as this statement of his demonstrates:

I have not and shall not read with any care or detail the education of Tina Aspern-Bordereau [he considers her a bastard] ... I do not intend to claim that a 'secret' narrative of Tina's "coming to self-consciousness" informs and controls all we have said about the patriarchal values of literature revealed in our interpretation ... Ultimately, Tina is nothing but the agent of a certain rebellion that is made possible by the entire circuit of James's narrative ... she remains to the very end doomed either to accept the characterization of herself as dependent woman or to "manipulate" its rhetoric ... To read Tina's education in all of this would be to claim that such education is possible within such a patriarchal culture ... No. We shall deny with Tina the possibility that some Bildungsroman is buried in the archives of The Aspern Papers.<sup>68</sup>

Rowe sees the possibility of another reading of Tina, but rejects it with an arbitrary, ideologically a priori commitment. It is true that there is no Bildungsroman, but not because Tina is naive. It is because she is self-conscious from the very beginning. The case is as follows: Rowe, as already quoted, indicts her of behaving like a child in the first part of the story. The narrator also detects some 'infantile



prattle' in her speech. But Chapter Nine demonstrates that she is capable of arranging, bargaining, and counter-plotting. So, how can the contradiction be solved - being child-like and self-conscious - without any Bildungsroman? The clue is signified in the narrator's previous observation, in which he calls her 'infantile prattle' a 'trick'. In other words, Tina's pretence of innocence, and her seemingly spontaneous disposition, are in fact an aspect of her plot. Tina, before The Aspern Papers, is supposed to have dealt with other publishers, such as John Cumnor; have written to them; and acquired enough experience, together with the 'early education', to alert us to her sophistication. This is indeed underlined at the very beginning. In the first paragraph of Chapter One, the narrator unwittingly articulates the thesis of the novella saying, 'It is not supposed easy for women to rise to the large free view of anything, anything to be done; but they sometimes throw off a bold conception - such as a man wouldn't have risen to - with singular serenity' (AP,3; my emphasis). What is projected here is not Bildungsroman at all, but a quality already possessed.

This quality informs the latter part of Tina's plot. Immediately after the death of her aunt, the narrator asks her 'if she has some general plan', and she replies, contrary to his expectation, 'Oh yes, oh yes, but I haven't settled things yet' (AP,p.125). Then, she informs him that she possesses all the papers, and presents him with Aspern's portrait. The function of this procedure is to narrow down the narrative and make it as direct and straightforward as possible. In other

words, whereas Tina usually muffles herself and foregrounds Juliana as the possessor of the documents, the aunt's death offers her two options: either to turn metaphysical and to stick to the original order, or to be realistic and 'rise' to the new diegetic position. Being realistic herself, as will be demonstrated later on, she embarks on the second alternative and makes the whole venture an open confrontation between the narrator and herself.

She starts the new stage with a definite, almost monosemic, sign, saying that the papers were hidden in bed - 'Between the mattresses' (AP, p.128). But he does not perceive this matrimonial suggestion: 'Let's go to bed together and (s)exchange the papers.' Therefore Tina speaks up again using a sign that is too realistic to be misunderstood. It is her own reading of Juliana's last intention. The aunt, being on her death bed, can only 'make signs'. Tina interprets Juliana's signs as a recommendation for marriage. She says, 'if you were a relation it would be different' (AP, p.133). The conditional is very accurate because it signifies that he is not a relation now, and that it is highly improbable he will become one, but the hypothesis is not impossible. This directness corners the narrator. Whatever his attitude may be, it will fall within the spectrum of the realistic: accepting or refusing her proposal. But the possibility of attaching himself to a social institution, as already established, is foreign to his 'romance'. So he dematerializes the occasion and consults Aspern, who seems to advise him to decline the demand. Hence the narrator intentionally misreads the sign attributed to



Juliana: 'I think I know what your poor aunt wanted to say. She wanted to give instructions that her papers should be buried with her' (AP,p.133). But being playful and unrelated to the sign, his interpretation puts paid to his own project. To be buried, the documents should be cremated first. Tina burns them and closes down the novella, which the narrator has opened up.

He is given a last opportunity to 'rise', but he he proves to be 'inadequate'.<sup>69</sup> He fails to accommodate Tina's 'ground', or to transcend his own monologism. She, by contrast, has demonstrated her realistic approach, which is socially responsive and comprehensive. All the signs she gives him express her quest and incorporate his objective. While he pursues the papers only, she toils for marriage and for his desired object.

Tina's realism is not directly expressed so much as stylistically encoded throughout the text. From the start, she states her quest for a 'man', not a god, because she self-consciously denounces mythologization. This occurs in Chapter Five, when the narrator asks her if Juliana 'liked' Aspern. Tina replies, 'She said he was a god', and he comments, 'Miss Tina gave me the information flatly, without expression; her tone might have made it a piece of trivial gossip' (AP,p.64). Despite the narrator's attempt to depreciate Tina's attitude, it reflects the positive aspects of her realism: her objectivity and her refusal to 'romanticize'. She does not rejoin, 'He is/was a god', which might signify her involvement in the fabulation. The difference between



'realistic' and 'romantic' in this context is epitomized in the mode of Tina's articulation above and the narrator's reaction to her words. Her manner is a 'trivialization' of the 'romantic', whereas his is a sort of intoxication. He reveals that the information 'stirred me deeply as she dropped the words into the summer night; their sound might have been the light rustle of an old unfolded love-letter' (AP,p.64). Not only does he lyricize but he incipiently misinterprets the incident as evidence of the existence of the papers.

Tina's anti-romanticism is also evident in her realistic understanding of her own economic conditions. She describes these to the narrator, saying, 'We're poor, we live very badly - almost on nothing' (AP,p.21). The fact that she feels poverty and condemns it, ('very badly'), demonstrates that she does not mystify her situation, but renders it realistically. Being in poverty and out of it highlights her concept of observation, in contrast to the narrator's invention. She applies this to everything. She observes the narrator, for instance, and concludes that he is rich, that he is after the papers, and that, according to his discourse and demeanour, he may be in love with her. This concept is dramatized by Tina's mixing and socializing with the narrator, and then withdrawing. She theatrically slips away and absents herself for some time to process, and contextualize, the new data, as occurs at the end of Chapter Four. Here the narrator wants to know if Juliana suspects him, whether she has any weak points, and he wishes he could bring Tina 'a little' life. These contradictory significations require immediate processing, so Tina departs

'abruptly, without any ceremony of parting' (AP,p.37). She just says, 'Oh I must stay with my aunt', perhaps to inform her of the new findings and to collaborate with her about the next step. The same theatrical performance occurs at the end of Chapter Six when the narrator confesses his complicity with John Cumnor by admitting that he writes about Aspern. Tina exclaims 'Santo Dio' and hurries 'upstairs and out of sight' (AP,p.66).

The retirement upstairs does not signify a withdrawal from observation because the Bordereaus' apartment functions like an observatory. The windows, a medium of observation, and a conjunction between the mind and the world, are repeatedly foregrounded in the novella.<sup>70</sup> The most memorable example is in Chapter Four, where the narrator says:

during the hours I sat in the garden looking up over the top of my book at the closed windows of my hostess. In these windows no sign of life ever appeared, it was as if, for fear of my catching a glimpse of them, the two ladies passed their days in the dark. But this only emphasized their having matters to conceal; which was what I had wished to prove. Their motionless shutters became as expressive as eyes consciously closed, and I took comfort in the probability that, though invisible themselves, they kept me in view between the lashes (AP,p.44).

A frame-formation is dictated by the windows themselves, which, being closed, block the narrator's perception, but allow the Bordereaus an observational omniscience - windows as 'eyes'. Their very function ironizes the narrator's



representation of the situation. He indicts the two women of being in the dark, but it is clear that because they are literally in the dark, he becomes metaphorically so.

The duality of the Bordereaus' observation, as both saturation and detachment, enables them to encompass the narrative, and to hold the narrator in the suspense of their verisimilitude till the end. Otherwise, if 'observation refuses to "go beyond" the object of sense', as Rowe says, 'then the closed form (the monument of objet d'art) seems to deny its history, cancel its temporality, and block the viewer's "entrance"'.<sup>71</sup> Observation extends to the semiotic plane, for signs also come from the outside. Therefore, to be a good reader or a semiotician, as Tina is, is to be a realist. To be trapped in a 'romance', like the narrator, is to be a bad reader. Lyall Powers talking about two types of Jamesian character says something that touches on this distinction:

characters which owe more to invention than to observation are simply brilliant failures. Here 'invention' seems to be equivalent to 'unbridled fancy', but the essay so emphasizes the necessity of observation, reliance on factual data, as to suggest that the alternatives he [James] is concerned with are not so much 'imagination' versus 'fancy' as they are 'the real' versus 'the made up'.<sup>72</sup>

If the previous distinction is reformulated from the point of view of language, it can be said that 'realism' and 'romance' use two different modes of langue. Realism expresses itself in ordinary language, whereas the literary mode is the vehicle of romance. By the first is meant the often-monosemic



diction arranged in simple or compound unpoetic sentences the signification of which is too clear to be mystified, for it tends to be ratified by the collective code. An example of this is what Tina says to the narrator about the flowers in their garden: 'We've a few, but they're very common. It costs too much to cultivate them; one has to have a man' (AP, p.19; my emphasis). These are two compound sentences consisting of two simple ones each. Twenty words out of twenty two are monosyllabic. The only polysyllabic one is 'cultivate', which speaks for itself, and explains why Tina excludes it from the ordinary code. The epithet 'common' is a key-term because it signifies the realistic typology dominating Tina's life. It is a sign that the ordinary and the collective frame her approach. Such a discourse admits of few ambiguities, and any attempt to sophisticate it will sound superfluous.

This occurs between the narrator and his servant after Juliana's death. The servant informs his master of the news using the most literal description of death: 'They have put her into earth'. The narrator, as if expecting a play or a ploy in the utterance, exclaims, 'She's dead!'. The servant ironically comments, 'So it appears, since they've buried her' (AP, p.121). Irony here arises from taking burial as a sign for putting somebody into earth instead of taking 'putting into earth' as a sign of burial. The narrator is not accustomed to stylistic directness, but to mystification of/by language. To describe the simplicity of his tastes, as already quoted, he does not merely say, 'My taste is simple', but 'I live on flowers'. His unimpeded communication with Tina, we may say, is due to the

intelligibility, straightforwardness and commonness of her language, while the cumbrousness of comprehension she occasionally complains of is engendered by his stylistic mode."

The polarity of the two modes of language explains why Tina and the narrator cannot communicate properly, whereas members of a single group communicate easily. For instance, the narrator and Mrs. Prest, or the narrator and Cumnor, understand each other. This suggests that within each group there is what James calls a 'consensus'. In 'The Question of Our Speech', James says, 'A virtual consensus of the educated, of any gathered group, in regard to the speech that ... they profess to make use of, may well strike us ... as a natural, an inevitable assumption'. Then he adds that without this consensus 'the mere imparting of a coherent culture would never get under way'.<sup>73</sup>

It is ironic that Eagleton, who quotes Balibar to prove the existence of the two modes of language in Thomas Hardy, sets out to discredit the concept of ordinary language. He claims that 'The idea that there is a single "normal" language, a common currency shared equally by all members of society is an illusion'.<sup>74</sup> To substantiate his claim, he tries, in a purely formalistic way, to defamiliarize some ordinary public signs which tell commuters what to do in the underground, such as 'Dogs must be carried on the escalators'. Clearly, his use of the term 'normal', and the word 'society', is inaccurate. He should know that language for ordinary people is not hydra-headed, and that for those who use the escalators - a



sort of society - the word 'red', for instance, stands for the 'Central Line', not 'Oxford English Limited'. Eagleton is an academic applying his pedantry to the populace and denying them their 'ordinary' perspective. Hence the other irony: he himself, in the introduction to the Literary Theory, talks about 'popularization' as different from both sophistication and vulgarization, and describes his own project in that book as an endeavour to 'popularize' literary theory, which is nothing but reprocessing it into ordinary language. (Bernard Bergonzi has highlighted Eagleton's tergiversation and inconsistency.)<sup>75</sup>

It stands to reason to say that there is an ordinary language ratified by the collective, be it called 'normal' or 'common'. Its antithesis, the elitist language, which is much more open to deconstruction, exists too, be it labelled 'literary', 'educated', 'noble' or 'hifalutin'. The correspondence between these two modes on the one hand and romance and realism on the other is underlined by W.B. Michaels: 'The distinction drawn here between the novel and the romance, between a fundamentally mimetic use of language and one that questions the primacy of reference, has of course become canonical.'<sup>76</sup>

In fact, most of the dialogues between Tina and the narrator reflect the contradiction between directness and obliquity, intelligibility and mystification, ordinariness and literariness. In Chapter Five, for instance, they talk about the Bordereaus' seclusion. He draws on rhetoric: 'You and your



poor aunt are worse off than Carmelite nuns in their cells. Should you mind telling me how you exist without air...?' She simply says, 'We go to bed very early - earlier than you believe' (AP,p.54). Similarly, in Chapter Six, he obliquely asks, 'Couldn't you get them [the papers] from her [Juliana]?' She directly answers, 'And give them to you' (AP,p.82). Her realistic mode, as opposed to his mystification, also surfaces when he lures her to help him against Juliana but she protests saying, 'I can't do that without being false to my aunt'. Then, he tries to 'amoralize' her objection by undercutting the ethical bearing of the dialogue: 'What do you mean by being false to her' (AP,p.78)?

The conflict between the two modes generates a very specific deconstruction in the novella. It is the contradiction between the message and the code. As Paul Ricoeur says, 'A message is individual, [whereas] its code is collective'.<sup>77</sup> The first is arbitrary and diachronic, while the second is systematic and synchronic. This means that the relationship between them is always potentially deconstructive if the speaker fails to contextualize the message with the code. When the narrator talks about flowers, for instance, he should know that they are codified to signify love. If he really loves Tina, the individual message becomes identical with the collective code, and he and Tina will be speaking the same language. But to keep talking about flowers, to bombard her with roses, to carry on with his excursions with her, to wander with her for hours in the romantic setting of the

garden, to propose joint projects, to beg her for company, and to say that he does not love her can be true only if it is an understatement.

The narrator apparently does not know that the words he whispers in the garden may grow into trees. For a discourse always has an effect - love, hatred, respect, disgust, etc. - on the addressee.<sup>78</sup> That influence is usually harmonious with the code that facilitates the collective communication. In 'Lord Beaupre', James says that Beaupre gives his four girl cousins 'every sort of present that Bond Street could supply. But these demonstrations had only been held to constitute another pledge' (CT, VIII, p. 273; my emphasis). Accordingly, Tina is right to infer that the narrator loves her, but it is wrong for him to shrug that off. He says, 'I hadn't given her cause - distinctly I hadn't' (AP, p. 136). The adverb 'distinctly' is an implicit confession that the 'cause' has been given, if not intentionally by the narrator, then by his verbal and dramatic performance. Indeed, he is self-conscious about this distinction, as in Chapter Seven. When finding it difficult to communicate with Juliana, he says, 'I left my own words to suggest to her what they might' (AP, p. 91).

Finally, the extrinsic deconstruction, by the Bordereaus, is anticipated from the beginning. Mrs. Prest warns him that Tina and Juliana will 'lead you on to your ruin. They'll get all your money without showing you a scrap' (AP, p. 39). Indeed, they do. They counter his plot with a plot, his individuality with their solidarity, and when he tries to turn tail, Tina

makes sure that he leaves with his tail between his legs. He pretends to be disinterested, but they unmask him. He turns up rich and leaves 'in ruin'. He comes to detect the papers, but he narrates his own crime. He attempts to manipulate Tina as a source of information, but becomes the agent that betrays himself. He attempts to dictate to her, but becomes the actor performing the script she writes for him. He opens up the novella, but she closes it down. In short, he drops on them with his fiction of power, but Tina contains him with the power of her fiction, make-believe and suspense. She may not be a Scheherazade, but he is definitely an 'Orpheus'.

Yet he is given a clear chance to avoid such consequences when Tina informs him that she reads his signs and infers his wealth. He says, 'Dear me, I must talk differently now', but he does not do so until the very end of the novella (AP,p.32). Here he writes a note to Tina to apologize for not accepting her proposal. He says, 'How can I thank you for the rare confidence you've placed in me'. Then he reads it, that is, he reflects on his own style, and discovers that it 'sounded as if an acceptance [of marriage] were to follow' (AP,p.138). He tears up the note and learns to be more accurate, as his final words demonstrate. Gazing at Aspern's portrait, he says, 'When I look at it I can scarcely bear my loss - I mean of the precious papers' (AP,p.143). And were it not for the hyphenated modifier, the term 'loss' would still signify a gamut of possibilities - Tina being one of them. But the annotation



makes clear that he means only the loss of the papers. Even then perhaps the last clause might be read as a cover-up for the narrator's 'real' feeling: the loss of Tina.

But the fact that he is reminded of his failure by Aspern's portrait makes it more probable that he means the papers. The greatest loss, however, is that of having been in charge of the novella without achieving anything - except this change in discourse. For he has started, ironically in the last sentence, to reflect on his own medium, to think of the possible polysemy, to heed the gap that may exist between himself and his words, and to use loopholes. Bakhtin says, 'a loophole is the retention for oneself of the possibility for altering the ultimate meaning of one's words'.<sup>79</sup> As in Mallet's monologism in Roderick Hudson, by making the first-person narrator a surrogate author, James dramatizes the narrator's personal bad-faith as a particular function of a particular kind of discourse.

- <sup>1</sup>R. Williams, The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence (London, 1970), p.135.
- <sup>2</sup>M. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, translated by Caryl Emerson, Theory of History of Literature, 8 (Manchester, 1984), p.7.
- <sup>3</sup>J. Korg, 'What Aspern Papers? A Hypothesis', College English, 23 (1962), 378-81 (p.378).
- <sup>4</sup>See T. Todorov, 'The Structural Analysis of Literature: Henry James', in Structuralism: An Introduction, (Oxford, 1973), pp.73-101.
- <sup>5</sup>See L. Holland, The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James (Princeton, 1964).
- <sup>6</sup>J.C. Rowe, The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James (London, 1985), p.86.
- <sup>7</sup>L. Edel, ed., The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel by Henry James, (Westport, Conn., 1976; first published, 1957), p.36.
- <sup>8</sup>J. Goode, '"Character" and Henry James', New Left Review, 40 (1966), 55-75 (p.58).
- <sup>9</sup>See R.F. Franklin, 'Military Metaphors and the Organic Structure of Henry James's The Aspern Papers', Arizona Quarterly, 32 (1976), 327-40.  
(The imagery of the novella is a condemnation of the narrator's blind worship of a false god.)
- <sup>10</sup>M. McCarthy, Ideas and the Novel (London, 1980), p.6.  
(She attributes the 'etherealization' of the novel to Henry James. But once the oeuvre is looked at polyphonically, it becomes clear that that effect belongs to the characters. In The Aspern Papers, it is the narrator, who is 'etherizing' the real. Hence his failure.)
- <sup>11</sup>R. D. Hume, 'Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel', PMLA, 84 (1969), 282-90 (p.288).
- <sup>12</sup>R. Chase, 'The Broken Circuit: Romance and the American Novel', in American Critical Essays: Twentieth Century, edited by Harold Beaver (London, 1959), pp.313-31 (p.321).
- <sup>13</sup>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p.7.
- <sup>14</sup>The Expense of Vision, p.137.
- <sup>15</sup>W. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, (Chicago, 1961), p.357.
- <sup>16</sup>J.A. Ward, The Search for Form: Studies in the Structure of James's Fiction (Chapel Hill, 1967), p.41.
- <sup>17</sup>The Rhetoric of Fiction, p.8.
- <sup>18</sup>R. Barthes, Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology (London, 1984; first English edition, 1967), p.40.
- <sup>19</sup>J.W. Crowley, 'The Wiles of a Witless Woman: Tina in The Aspern Papers', Journal of the American Renaissance, 22 (1976), 159-68 (p.159).  
(After the phases of innocence and half-consciousness, Tina becomes mercenary. Her interest in money and social climbing makes her conspire against the narrator and Juliana. The ending is a kind of poetic justice.)
- <sup>20</sup>P. Brooks, Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative (Oxford, 1984), p.262.
- <sup>21</sup>H. James, Hawthorne, in Henry James: Literary Criticism, Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers, edited by L. Edel (New York, 1984), pp.315-457 (p.320).
- <sup>22</sup>See T. Eagleton, Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary



Criticism (London, 1981), p.108.

('In retreat from the market-place to study, politics to philology, social practice to semiotics, rhetoric was to end up as that vigorous demystifier of all ideology that itself provided the final ideological rationale for political inertia.')

<sup>23</sup>In A.R. Tinter, 'Three Ways of Viewing James', Studies in the Novel, 16 (1984), 326-38 (p.330).

<sup>24</sup>J.W. Beach, The Method of Henry James (Philadelphia, 1954), p.122.

<sup>25</sup>M. Geismar, Henry James and His Cult (London, 1964), p.5.

<sup>26</sup>L. Edel, editor, The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel by Henry James (Westport, Conn., 1973), p.102; and Malcolm Bradbury, What Is the Novel (London, 1969), p.17.

<sup>27</sup>See C. Norris, 'Deconstruction, Naming and Necessity: Some Logical Options', Journal of Literary Semantics, 13 (1984), 159-80.

(Norris argues that the sign is relative: a real reference may become fictional, and vice versa.)

<sup>28</sup>W. F. Wright, The Madness of Art: A Study of Henry James (Lincoln, 1962), p.105.

<sup>29</sup>M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays (Austin, 1981), p.294.

<sup>30</sup>D. O'Hara, The Romance of Interpretation: Visionary Criticism from Pater to de Man (New York, 1985), p.4.

<sup>31</sup>T. S. Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', in Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, edited by D. Lodge (London, 1978), pp. 77-84 (p.81).

<sup>32</sup>T. Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism (London, 1976), pp.65-6.

<sup>33</sup>T. Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory (London, 1978), p.145.

<sup>34</sup>Ann Jefferson and David Robey, Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction, second edition (London, 1986), p.189.

<sup>35</sup>The Search for Form, p.41.

<sup>36</sup>R. Godden, 'Some Slight Shifts in the Manners of the Novel of Manners', in Henry James: Fiction As History, edited by Ian Bell (London, 1984), p.26.

<sup>37</sup>T. Eagleton, The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-Structuralism (London, 1984), p.26.

<sup>38</sup>See N. Bradbury, Henry James: The later Novels (Oxford, 1979), p. 5.

(Her discussion of the term 'interest' is important.)

<sup>39</sup>I.F.A. Bell, Henry James: Fiction As History, (London, 1985), p.9.

<sup>40</sup>H. McCarthy, Henry James: The Creative Process (New York, 1958), p.58.

<sup>41</sup>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p.185.

<sup>42</sup>I. Bell, '"This Exchange of Epigrams": Commodity and Style in Washington Square', Journal of American Studies, 19 (1985), 49-68 (p. 58).

<sup>43</sup>H. James, Washington Square (Oxford, 1982), p.98.

<sup>44</sup>'The Subject of Power', p.10.

<sup>45</sup>See D. Schumacher, 'Subjectivities: A Theory of Critical Processes', in Feminist Literary criticism, edited by J. Donovan (Lexington, 1976), pp.29-37 (pp.32-3).

(The male is represented as the self, the centre, and



- the subject, whereas the female is the other, and the epitome of passivity).
- <sup>46</sup>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p.252.
- <sup>47</sup>J. Fetterley, The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction (Bloomington and London, 1978), p.ix.
- <sup>48</sup>T. Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics (London, 1977), p.125.
- <sup>49</sup>Structuralism and Semiotics, p.127.
- <sup>50</sup>See C. Belsey, Critical Practice (London, 1980).
- <sup>51</sup>W. B. Stein, 'The Aspern Papers: A Comedy of Masks', Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 14 (1959-60), 172-8 (p.178).
- <sup>52</sup>Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction, p.118.
- <sup>53</sup>See The Notebooks, p.73; The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James, p.28; and The Expense of Vision, p.168.
- <sup>54</sup>See S. Kappeler, Writing and Reading in Henry James (London, 1980), p.155; 'The Wiles of a "Witless" Woman', p.159; and B. Jensen-Osinski, 'The key to the Palpable Past: A Study of Miss Tina in The Aspern Papers', Henry James Review, 3 (1981), 4-10 (p.7).
- <sup>55</sup>'The Wiles of a "Witless" Woman ...', p.159.
- <sup>56</sup>'The Key to the Palpable Past: A Study of Miss Tina in The Aspern Papers', p.4.  
(Central to this article is the Venice code, which the narrator breaks all the time.)
- <sup>57</sup>'The Key to the Palpable Past: A Study of Miss Tina in The Aspern Papers', p.4.
- <sup>58</sup>See J.J. Waldmeir, 'Miss Tina Did It: A Fresh Look at The Aspern Papers', Centennial Review, 26 (1982), 256-67.  
(The narrator is not the 'villain of the piece'. The novella is modelled on the Edenic metaphor; Tina and Juliana are 'a sort of Satan and Eve'.)
- <sup>59</sup>H. James, Partial Portraits (Ann Arbor, 1970), p.269.
- <sup>60</sup>The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James, p.195.
- <sup>61</sup>R.T. Levine, 'A Failure of Reading: The Aspern Papers and the Ennobling Force of Literature', Essays in Art and Science, 12 (1983), 87-98 (p.87).  
(The narrator responds to Aspern's poetry but is not enlightened with it. Hence he represents the fall from poet to critic).
- <sup>62</sup>'What Aspern Papers?', p.379.
- <sup>63</sup>Writing and Reading in Henry James, p.40.
- <sup>64</sup>The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James, pp.108-9.
- <sup>65</sup>'What Aspern Papers? A Hypothesis', p.379.
- <sup>66</sup>The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James, p.114.
- <sup>67</sup>The Expense of Vision, p.149.
- <sup>68</sup>The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James, p.114.
- <sup>69</sup>See L.S. Person, Jr., 'Eroticism And Creativity in The Aspern Papers', Literature and Psychology, 32 (1986), 20-9.  
(Aspern represents the fusion of art and love, or creativity and eroticism. The narrator fails because he cannot accommodate these two sides.)
- <sup>70</sup>In his lecture-seminar, 'A Small Child and Otherness: Henry James and Windows' (at the Centre for Research in Philosophy and Literature, University of Warwick, May 27th, 1986), Duncan Webster addresses the function and symbolism of 'windows' in the fiction of Henry James.
- <sup>71</sup>The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James, p.202.

- <sup>72</sup>L.H. Powers, Henry James and the Naturalist Movement (Michigan, 1971), p.36.
- <sup>73</sup>H. James, The Question of Our Speech, The Lesson of Balzac: Two Lectures (Boston and New York, 1905), p.6.
- <sup>74</sup>T. Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Oxford, 1983), p.5.
- <sup>75</sup>B. Bergonzi, 'The Terry Eagleton Story', in The Myth of Modernism and Twentieth-Century Literature (London, 1986), pp.188-209.
- <sup>76</sup>'Romance and the Real Estate', in The American Renaissance Reconsidered, edited by W.B. Michaels and D.E. Pearce (Baltimore, 1985), pp.156-82 (p.156).
- <sup>77</sup>P. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Texas, 1976), p.3.
- <sup>78</sup>See J.L. Austin, How To Do Things With Words, second edition (Oxford and New York, 1975; first published, 1962); D. Holdcroft, Words and Deeds: Problems in the Theory of Speech Acts (Oxford, 1978); and Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning. (Speech-act theorists confirm that language, be it locutionary (an act of saying), or illocutionary (an act performed in saying something), is always perlocutionary: it always has an effect on the addressee.)
- <sup>79</sup>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p.233.



## CHAPTER TWO

### The Tragic Muse: The Critical Reception and the Problem of Reading

'It seemed clear that I needed  
big cases - small ones would  
practically give my central idea  
away' (AN, p.82).

The Tragic Muse, unlike James's other works, is both 'under-read' and misread. Its critical reception, instead of engaging the text, has engaged itself in issues that are, by and large, peripheral. These issues are topicality, genealogy and quasi-intertextuality. The critics of the first group have categorized the novel as a register of the topics of the day, which reduces the book from a novel for posterity to a work for the moment. Similarly, all the critiques of the second group give the impression that the genealogy of the characters is the centre of the novel. As will be seen later on, this is not only a misreading of the text, but a misrepresentation of the Jamesian oeuvre. Moreover, by limiting this form of attention to one of the characters, Gabriel Nash, the genealogists have under-read the work: they have overlooked all the other characters. The same applies to the critics of quasi-intertextuality. These address intertextuality as a kind of plagiarism, and expend their efforts in trying to find out how James camouflages the 'cribbing' they think he has done. These critics not only fail to capitalize on an issue of great potential, but also fail to bring their focus to bear on the text itself. For the dialogue between James and other artists, or The Tragic Muse and other texts, is thematized in the novel



in the form of the anxiety of influence. In short, the failure that the novel is accused of is itself a failure of reading. Hence the Chapter will debate the three approaches both as forms of attention and as specific critiques of The Tragic Muse. Then it will introduce the reading which is called for by the novel itself.

As will be seen in the next chapter, The Tragic Muse is structured upon the disjunction between parents and children, seniors and juniors, old and young, and precursors and acolytes. The constituents of these patterns can be categorized into two conflictual paradigms: predecessors and ephebes. The forebears - parents, lovers and mentors - who cannot delegate or polyphonize, are represented as planning to dictate to their juniors, to run their lives for them, and eventually to dehumanize them into passive agents or mere mouthpieces. They want to play the omniscient, omnipotent, and ubiquitous gods - the Mallets and the Slopers of the Jamesian world. This conflict homes in on the intra-artistic, for the major parent-figures, Nash and Madame Carré, belong to the establishment of art.

In other words, the two forms of the conflict are variations on the same theme. For both - children versus parents, and acolytes against precursors - represent the past at loggerheads with the future, and precaution in conflict with precocity. The ephebes are represented as having embarked on a project of self-definition, but the preceptors try to block every access to the future. The latter, being monologicistic,

relate themselves antagonistically to their disciples, which generates a reversal of relationships, and a polarity, which frame the whole novel. Parenthood becomes policing; supervision, subversion; instruction, destruction; and criticism, cynicism. The specificity of this intra-artistic conflict is that it is polyphonically orchestrated, and is centred upon the anxiety of influence.

To demonstrate how The Tragic Muse has been both misread and 'under-read', this chapter is going to be an extensive study of its critical reception. The purpose is to argue the case of the novel and to do homage to it after the unjustifiable neglect most critics have emphasized. W.W. Robson, for example, wonders why it has not generated a massive body of criticism, saying, 'It is strange that The Tragic Muse should be the most neglected of his [James's] longer novels'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Tony Tanner observes that 'this fine novel receives less critical attention than any of James's novels'. He adds, 'going through the critical journals of the last fifteen years - indeed further back - I found only one serious article devoted to this novel'.<sup>2</sup> Sixteen years later, W.R. Macnaughton observes that 'the longest novel by Henry James ... is in all probability also the novel by him least read and least highly regarded despite the occasionally valiant attempts to create an audience for the work'.<sup>3</sup> the irony is that despite the repeated comments that The Tragic Muse has been overlooked, the novel has, in a certain way, continued to be neglected; and its specificity, skated over. Hence the poor reception reflects on the critical reception, not on the novel itself.



# 1. Fiction As Vulgar Reflection:

## The Tragic Muse and Topicality

Many critics postulate that the major preoccupation of The Tragic Muse is topicality. This means that the issues conflated in the text recall the topics in circulation at the time of the novel's publication; or that the novel itself is a discursive dissertation on a certain topic. Accordingly, the task of criticism is to relate the work to its public sphere by listing the issues in common to both sides; or to talk in extra-literary terms about the philosophical treatise of the text. To be sure, topicality may be an artistic device for creating a conjunction between the literary work and its historical moment. In this case, the text sets out to incorporate the code of the contemporary within itself just as some works self-consciously choose to place themselves in an uncontemporary setting (Eco's The Name of the Rose, and James's The Sense of the Past, for instance). But topicality may limit itself to a reversal of the proper artistic process: mistaking the street for the stage and vice versa.<sup>4</sup> In other words, it may be, as James puts it, a mere 'vulgarization'. The latter term is also used by Gordon and Stokes in reference to Mrs. Ward's mode of production. They say, 'Her huge success [after the publication of Miss Bretherton] was to depend on seizing the effective "topic" and on finding a fictionally acceptable vehicle for it, her gift for vulgarization'.<sup>5</sup> James's novel is sometimes seen as a superior version of this, despite the fact that he repeatedly defines himself against this kind of 'writing'.

What I want to argue is that topicality in this sense is un-Jamesian not only because it reverses the world of the novel to a novel of the world, but because it reduces the two to one word: the topic. James, as Eliot's famous judgement makes clear, has 'a mind so fine that no idea could violate it'.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, topicality puts paid to the priority of characters by subordinating them, as illustrations, to the theme. (James believes that characters come first - a principle of composition he recognized as his own in Turgenev). This premise is central to him, as Richard Poirier confirms. For Poirier, unlike Eliot, believes that James's mind is 'saturated with ideas', and he agrees that James 'feared lest he used characters merely as illustrations of them'.<sup>7</sup>

The topical form entails that the novel deal with a limited number of issues - perhaps just one - and try to exhaust them as a dissertation does its thesis. So agrees Darshan Maini, who says, 'The Tragic Muse ... is primarily and preeminently a long Jamesian dissertation on the value of art'.<sup>8</sup> Such a view necessitates a totally different approach from the Jamesian discourse. It favours an omniscient voice intervening from time to time, and disrupting the narrative to comment and philosophize. These aspects, by and large, have no place in the Jamesian oeuvre: 'dramatize, dramatize' is his all-time perspective. This is why any essentially topical reading is un-Jamesian for, as Bakhtin says, it mistakes the artist for the publicist.<sup>9</sup> And indeed the sheer multiplicity of the topics suggested confirms the futility of the approach. Marcia Jacobson cites some of them: 'The Tragic Muse - as



contemporary reviewers recognised - was conceived and developed in response to topical issues ... the theatre, aestheticism, and the changing relations between the sexes'.<sup>10</sup> The list includes still more: politics, the value of art, the conflict between art and society, the British versus the French, individuality and typicality, the past and the present, the concept of representation, diplomacy, and the list can go on endlessly. The irony is that if a work is as economical and intense as for instance Heart of Darkness, then almost every sentence can be a 'topic'. This infinity confirms that the the dissertational topicality is impossible.

Yet most critics represent The Tragic Muse as governed by this topical approach. The topic foregrounded by most of them is the conflict between art and the 'world'. Dorothea Krook, to start with, claims that the central theme of The Tragic Muse is the conflicting claims of the world of art and the world of affairs. She tries to substantiate this by remarking that Nick 'sacrifices a brilliantly promising career in the House of Commons for the hazardous career of a portrait painter'. Miriam also, Krook adds, 'turns down the offer of a splendid marriage with a clever and cultivated young diplomat' in order to remain an actress'.<sup>11</sup> This judgement is clearly biased against art. Its very diction distorts the central idea of the novel. Krook is taking for granted what few critics dare do. For instance, is Peter really a clever diplomat? Or is not his limitation precisely his being so undiplomatic? Peter is clearly ironized by the contradictory pressures of diplomacy and romanticism - his career and his character. Macnaughton touches on the

schism of Peter's character, saying, 'In essence, he is an ironic portrait of someone who appears to be, or should be, (given his profession) under control, but who is not, and a character whose actions are frequently driven by motives he neither understands nor acknowledges'.<sup>12</sup>

Lyall Powers reduces the topical issue to Nick Dormer's case: 'In The Tragic Muse, the conflict between art and the "world" is presented as Nick Dormer's problem of choosing between a political career and the life of a painter'.<sup>13</sup> Marcia Jacobson, on the other hand, believes that Miriam, not Nick, is the topical focus: 'we are probably correct in assuming that the Miriam-Peter story came first. This story poses the conflicts of art and "the world" and of men and women in irreconcilable terms'.<sup>14</sup> If the opposition is irreconcilable, then one side must eventually triumph over the other. William Hall, ironically, announces the winner. He proclaims that 'The conflict between art and the world is over and the world has won hands down, in every area of the conflict'.<sup>15</sup> But why does the world give art the knock-out? Sergio Perosa has an explanation. The world, he asserts, is experimenting with art, and is literally gaming with it. He says, 'The world seems to allow the challenge to its social exclusiveness ... But it fights tooth and nail - that is, by financial might, moral blackmail, emotional expression and social retaliation to prevent the escape of its members and to withstand the assault of the "tragic muse" without compromising its internal balance'.<sup>16</sup>



The common premise of all these comments is summed up by Marcia Jacobson: 'The eighties and the nineties consequently are distinguished in literary history by the extraordinary increase in the amount of topical fiction produced. The working-class novel, the feminist novel, the religious crisis novel all date from this period - as do the detective story, and the exotic adventure novel, escapist fiction which is after all a form of response to social change'.<sup>17</sup> It seems to me that what Jacobson is talking about is not topicality as such, but new genres, or what James calls 'the plasticity of the novel. The fin de siecle seethes with NEWNESS, as Holbrook Jackson documents in The Eighteen Nineties. This is a sign of transition: the end of a century and the beginning of a NEW one. In his introduction to a new edition of Jackson's book, Malcolm Bradbury cites 'the "New Spirit," the "New Humour," the "New Drama," the "New Unionism," the "New Party," and the "New Woman"'.<sup>18</sup> Of course, genres relate to their historical moment, but not in the spirit of daily newspapers or weekly journals. Jacobson seems to be aware of the inaccuracy of her statement. This is why she interpolates the loophole remark on 'escapism' and 'social change'.

A topical reading also flies in the face of James's criticism of the period, as manifested in 'The Future of the Novel' (1899). For this confirms that James is not only self-conscious about the public sphere, but that he disengages himself from it, and defines his art in contradistinction to it: 'The flood at present swells and swells, threatening the whole field of letters, as would often seem with submersion'.<sup>19</sup>

This quantitative quagmire has its qualitative consequences: 'The high prosperity of fiction has marched, very directly, with another "sign of the times", the demoralisation, the vulgarisation of literature in general'.<sup>20</sup> What the situation requires is a saviour of art: 'One almost, for the very love of it, likes to think of its appearing threatened with some such fate, in order to figure the dramatic stroke of its revival under the touch of a life-giving master'.<sup>21</sup> James is highly aware of his time but not in the spirit of topicality. In his essay on Trollope, he says, 'Trollope did not write for posterity; he wrote for the day, the moment; but these are just the writers whom posterity is apt to put into its pocket'.<sup>22</sup>

The further misreading arises from James's use of the terms, 'art' and 'world' in the Preface to The Tragic Muse. Recollecting the genesis of the novel, James remembers: 'To "do something about art" - art, that is as a human complication and a social stumbling-block - must have been for me early a good deal of a nursed intention, the conflict between art and the "world" striking me thus betimes as one of the half-dozen great primary motives' (AN, p.79; notice the double inverted commas). It is easy to take the phrase, 'the conflict between art and the "world"', out of context, and to foreground it as the centre of the novel. But it does not need a polemicist or a pedant to observe the ambiguity of that phrase. James's syntax here in particular, and everywhere in general, as James E. Miller, Jr. draws attention to, has to be treated with care.<sup>23</sup>



What does 'a social stumbling-block', for instance, stand for? Does it signify that art is a problem for society and an obstacle for the social (society stumbling over art)? Does it mean that society is a dilemma for art (art stumbling over society)? Does it suggest that art is a social problematic exactly as schooling is? Or does it not indicate that art is its own problem as far as its relationship with society is concerned? In other words, is the question a schism within the social, a dichotomy between society and art, or an ambivalence within the establishment of art itself, as put forward at the beginning of this Chapter? Walter Bate says, 'The principal difficulty for the modern poet or artist was not society and "unpoetic" customs and surroundings ... But the essential problem - the real anxiety ... had to do with the artist's relation to his own art'.<sup>24</sup> Nick's problem, for instance, is not a conflict with the world, for that is what James calls a case. His dilemma is a matter of medium, which is mainly artistic.<sup>25</sup>

In short, James's preoccupation is to 'do something about art', not about society. One should also bear in mind that this conflict is just 'one of the half-dozen great primary motives' James cites in the Preface (AN, p.79). Understanding the other five may put this further into perspective. The text makes clear that James is reflecting on some artistic concerns with a special bearing on The Tragic Muse. These are the question of representation, the mode of orchestrating the multiplicity of voices, the anxiety of influence, the 'centre controversy', and the structural symmetry of the novel. This creates a specifically artistic context, and Kenneth Graham is rightly

doubtful about the credibility of a basically topical reading. As he says, 'Criticism of The Tragic Muse, when criticism has bothered about it, has usually emphasized its "public" aspect. Here is James, we are told, investigating the problems of philistinism, aestheticism, and politics in nineteenth-century England, and writing a panoramic novel that tends to become a loosely handled debate - in Leon Edel's words, "a cold discursive novel"'.<sup>26</sup> Graham plausibly introduces the story of talent instead.

Of course Edel's LHJ does emphasize topicality in James, especially in The Princess Casamassima, but the Preface to The Princess is an apology for topicality: 'My vision of the aspects I more or less fortunately rendered was, exactly, my knowledge'. James explains what such a position entails, saying that the value and the effect of that work are 'those of our not knowing, of society's not knowing, but only guessing and suspecting and trying to ignore what "goes on"' (AN, pp.77-8). James is highlighting the distinction between the discursive or the dissertational and the artistic. Impressions, impulses, glimpses are all forms of resistance that deter topics from 'violating', or vulgarizing, the literary work. This recalls what Bakhtin says about Dostoevsky. The latter 'neither knows nor perceives, nor represents the "idea in itself"'.<sup>27</sup>

However, arguing against topicality is not an advocacy of the hermetic text any more than arguing against fashion is a testimonial for nudity. The nexus between the literary work and



its public sphere is as essential, deep and uncontroversial as is the umbilical cord. But to foreground the topical at the expense of the novel is to preserve the placenta and ditch the baby. James says, 'It seemed clear that I needed big cases -, small ones would practically give my central idea away' (AN, p.82). The term 'cases' reveals that topics are sheer receptacles for the art inside.<sup>28</sup> The irony is that the more sophisticated or the more enigmatic the central idea is, the larger the cases will be. Consequently, there will be a greater possibility that criticism may mistake the one for the other. This is why the conjunction between the public sphere and the private one in James tends to be subtle and refined. It is this subtlety that Gordon and Stokes underline in 'The Reference of The Tragic Muse'. They distinguish between two modes of topicality, which can be labelled as the 'weekly moment' and the 'historical moment'. They apply the first to Miss Bretherton, which 'is as topical as any article in that week's paper'; and the second, to The Tragic Muse. They describe the latter as being 'simultaneously both "topical" and acutely personal'.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, instead of polarizing art and life, as other critics have done, they speak in a plausible and Jamesian way about 'the life of art'.

The basis of this argument is that James does not view art and the world as antithetical entities. His writings on fiction emphasize their inextricability. In Picture and Text, for example, while talking about 'the immense field of contemporary life', he says, 'there is nothing so interesting as that because it is ourselves; and no artistic problem is so charming

as to arrive, either in a literary or a plastic form, at a close and direct notation of what we observe'.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, in The Scenic Art, he underlines the kinship, not the conflict, between art and the world. Here, he argues that theatres offer 'a good deal of interesting evidence upon the manners and customs of the people ... They testify to the civilization ... and throw a good deal of light upon the ways of thinking, feeling and behaving of the community'.<sup>31</sup> Testifying to the civilization is the fine Jamesian nexus, which is categorically different from being a register of the daily noise:

As will be argued in Chapter Four, the specificity of The Tragic Muse arises from the internal intensity of the artistic focus (including painting, fiction, and the theatre). For the questions facing all the characters are questions of execution. Lady Agnes's problem, for instance, is authorial: she cannot 'do the British matron' properly. Similarly, Julia's dilemma is compositional: the dialogism of her discourse is not effective because it is blurred by the opaque stylization she embarks on. Peter's failure is also technical: he either oversays or undersays what he means. Like the narrator of The Aspern Papers, the only moment he achieves what David Smit calls 'psychological monism' - the equivalence between the signified and the signifier, or intention and expression - occurs in Chapter Fifty-One, that is, at the very end of the novel.<sup>32</sup> Miriam and Nick are successful because they transform their 'literal' problematics into metaphorical media. She tropes on her own medium, subsumes the theatrical into her character, and turns it into an approach. Nick, finding himself the 'sport of



the gods', makes sport of everybody else. He converts the crisis of his character into a spider's web, and makes all the characters play into his hands. This is why they take him seriously, mistake his make-believe for the truth, and think of his fictive language as a descriptive one.

## 2. Madame Tussaud or Monsieur James

Even shallower than the previous approach is the second aspect of the novel's critical reception: the genealogy concept. This concentrates on only one of the characters, Gabriel Nash, and is therefore doubly flawed. Instead of addressing the text as a whole, or relating Nash to the work, this approach generates itself in a self-sustaining process. The critiques written about Nash engender each other in a way that renders The Tragic Muse redundant, as the following sample demonstrates: 'Mr. James's Aesthetic Mr. Nash', 'Gabriel Nash - Somewhat Less Than an Angel', 'Mr. James's Aesthetic Mr. Nash - Again', 'Gabriel Nash's "House of Idols"' and 'Gabriel Nash: Henry James's Comic Spirit'. The common denominator of these is the search for Nash's precursor. They all assume that James has modelled him on somebody: himself, his father, Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater or the angel Gabriel. W.W. Robson, for instance, claims that Gabriel Nash is 'a representative of the Oscar Wilde phase of the Aesthetic movement'.<sup>33</sup> R.P. Blackmur and Oscar Cargill agree to this categorization. Leon Edel is at loggerheads with them and states his viewpoint three times.

On the first occasion he says, 'Gabriel Nash ... speaks for - and even resembles physically the novelist himself'.<sup>34</sup> Eleven years later, he repeats his judgement with a slight modification. This time style is the common denominator between James and Nash. Edel says, 'Gabriel Nash talks undiluted Henry James'.<sup>35</sup> Apart from the disputability of this approach in general, that is, whether or not Nash is James, Edel's judgements are arguable too. First, is Nash's physiognomy a metonymic code signifying the source or the model he is supposed to look like? Or is it not a metaphorical expression of his own character? Self-reference can be ironic or multifold: what seems like a conjunction may be just the vehicle for a real disjunction, especially in this case.

Edel's second point is incomprehensive. The epithet, 'undiluted', is ambiguous, for there can indeed be a 'diluted' James, the writer of the Notebooks, the letters, and the travelogues, as distinguished from the 'undiluted' James, the writer of the novels, the tales and the plays.<sup>36</sup> These two sometimes co-exist in the same medium as well. Accordingly, one should at least ask Leon Edel what he means by Nash's speaking 'undiluted' James. Does he speak the undiluted-diluted James, or the undiluted undiluted one? Later on, Edel merges the two statements, saying that Nash '"talks" Henry James; and in appearance he even resembles his creator. But he is far from being the novelist' (LHJ, I, p. 839). In the same paragraph, after making Nash a non-James James, Edel adds, 'He is much more the Count de Montesquiou than Oscar Wilde or Whistler - but he is also Henry James's father who spent his life in talk'. This is



not all: 'We know the actual model for Nash ... Herbert Pratt' (LHJ, I, p. 839). No wonder Gordon and Stokes suggest that 'given the failure of the characters themselves to determine Nash's place among them, it is extraordinarily misguided for critics to expend their energy in trying to discover 'a precise historical model'.<sup>37</sup> It seems to me that Edel's approach to James's characters is framed by his biographical approach to James himself. In the biography, for instance, every time he comes across a character, he says something to the effect that it is very easy to pinpoint the 'original' or the 'source' for it. In fact, he tours into James's fiction as he tours into his life, or as anyone does at Madame Tussaud.<sup>38</sup>

Like Edel, Lyall Powers believes that Nash is his creator, but he articulates his claim from a different angle. He thinks that Nash is James because both honour Balzac. One wonders whether their admiration of the French novelist, by analogy, makes them two Balzacs! Powers adds, 'What further strengthens the case that James had himself principally in mind as a source for Nash is the similarity between his own views on the contemporary British theatre and those of Nash'.<sup>39</sup> Powers seems to be aware of the flaw in his statement and of the embedded counter-argument. So he takes up the other case and represents it as inconsequential: 'This realization [that Nash is James] helps us understand why the satire in Nash's characterization is comparatively light'.<sup>40</sup> Light or ... literal, James's representation of Nash surely refutes any identification between the two. Nash is represented as being erratic, predictable, conventional, containable, defeatable and

self-contradictory. James distances himself from Nash exactly as he disengages himself from the narrator of The Aspern Papers. Polyphony, after all, is the narrative mode of representing the dramatis personae as characters in their own right. The polyphonist, Bakhtin says, 'never drowns the other's voice'.<sup>41</sup>

The critics mentioned so far endeavour to allocate one source each for Nash. Others try to make him a composite patchwork with somebody's head, another's body and somebody else's something else. These analysts relegate his character, his being an author-thinker or a precursor, to what he symbolizes or stands for. The result is no longer Wilde or Henry James, but a synthesis of suppositions. Robert Baker, for instance, talks about a synthetic Nash, who 'stands not only as an indictment of Walter Pater, but an indictment of the aesthete, who despite his intelligent social criticism would abandon society and life itself, devoting his mind and soul to a peculiarly Jamesian version of narcissism'.<sup>42</sup> Unlike Baker, Marcia Jacobson believes that Nash 'combines elements' of the two contradictory versions of the aesthete in the eighties. He is both the aesthete who manipulates life for artistic purposes, and the poseur who transforms his own life into a work of art'.<sup>43</sup> Baker and Jacobson attribute to James what he always distances himself from - 'going behind' the character - in the sense of reducing him/her to a formula. Of course, the reader knows that the 'genealogists', like the advocates of topicality, are the real reductionists.



The effect of reduction is usually leaving the real questions unanswered. Indeed, this is what happens here, for despite the list of Nash's models, Nash, the character in the novel, is still waiting to be introduced, as Rolland Wallace confirms: 'A number of critics have analysed the charming and often exasperating Gabriel Nash ... but most of the critical discussions have aimed at discovering a source for the character rather than revealing his function in the novel'.<sup>44</sup> It is not only Nash's function that is left almost untouched, but the roles of the other dozen or so characters. The irony is that Nash is not a major character: James does not even mention him in the Preface.

In fact, genealogy is not only an under-reading of the novel, but a misreading of James, for he keeps reiterating that it is failure and non-art. Hence Nash should be addressed as Nash, exactly as Nona Vincent is Nona Vincent. In the tale entitled after that character, Allan Wayworth, who is mystified by the genealogy of his heroine, has a dream about the reality of her identity. She appears to him as she 'really' is, and puts an end to his genealogical speculations. She is neither Mrs. Alsager, the one he has thought of as a source for Nona, nor is she Violet, the actress who plays the heroine. She is simply herself. The narrator describes the scene at that supreme moment, saying,

Nona Vincent, in face and form, the living heroine of his play, rose before him in his silent little room, sat down with him at his dingy fireside. She was not Violet Grey [the actress], she was not Mrs. Alsager [Allan's acquaintance], she was not any woman he had seen

upon earth, nor was it any masquerade of friendship or of penitence. Yet she was more familiar to him than the women he had known best, and she was ineffably beautiful and consoling ... Nothing more real had ever befallen him, and nothing, somehow, more reassuring. He felt her hand upon his own, and all his senses seemed to open to her message. She struck him, in the strangest way, both as his creation and his inspirer, and she gave him the highest consciousness of success (CT, VIII, p.183).

What the narrator suggests here is that modelling a character on an anterior source is as wrong-headed as fathering the same character on a posterior one. It is such an attitude that James argues for in the Preface to 'The Lesson of the Master'. The original 'germ' and the fabula cease to be what they have been the moment they enter a literary work. In literature they lose their primal being and acquire a new self-authenticating identity, as he says. Once metamorphosed, James adds, these products become self-referring and will not be bound anymore to their genesis unless they are utter failures. 'Therefore', he concludes, 'let us have here as little as possible about its "being" Mr. This or Mrs. That [Nash's critics, strangely enough, have not suggested a female model for him]. If it adjusts itself with the least truth to its new life it can't possibly be either. If it gracelessly refers itself to either, if it persists as the impression not artistically dealt with, it shames the honour offered it and can only be spoken of as having ceased to be a thing of fact and not yet become a thing of truth' (AN, pp.301-2).

The insistence that a character be intrinsically himself or herself is the ethical and metaphysical heart of James's



deep-rooted polyphony. The Tragic Muse, as will be argued, seethes with the struggle for individuation. Selfhood necessitates the swerving from all forms and agents of monologism: acolyte from mentor, child from parent, and ephebe from precursor. Julia has to swerve from George; Lady Agnes, from Sir Nicholas; Nick, from his mother; Miriam, from her mother, and most importantly, Nick, from Nash, and Miriam, from Madame Carre'. It is this quest for individuality that bedevils Carteret, and makes him say to Nick, 'Do you turn against your father' (TM, II, p. 172)? Nash's importance arises from his contribution to the ephebe/precursor theme; and to consider him in terms of his own 'precursors' is to miss the wood for the trees.

### 3. Intertextuality

The last aspect of the novel's critical reception concerns the possible inter-relations between The Tragic Muse and William Black's Macleod of Dare (1878) and Mrs. Ward's Miss Bretherton (1884).<sup>45</sup> Several critics have underlined what seems to them to be the influence of the earlier two works on James's novel, but their accounts, by and large, are either pedestrian or one-sided. These critics have limited themselves to sweeping statements, or to the study of one of the texts in question. James, of course, was well aware of the other two novels. He wrote an article about Macleod of Dare in 1878, and sent an important letter to Mrs. Ward in reference to her Miss Bretherton in 1884. Moreover, in his Notebooks, there is an entry dated June 14th, 1884, which relates Mrs. Ward's

anecdote. Hence what is needed is a systematic study of the three novels to ascertain the nature of their intertextuality. Marcia Jacobson updates the debate and provides a useful starting point:

Why did he [James] profess 'vagueness of remembrance' and discuss his novel so as to obscure the fact that the examination of the character of the actress was such a strong provocation for him? In part, James' silence was probably a tactful gesture, motivated by a wish not to provoke comparisons with the work of a friend. In part, perhaps it reflects a desire to stress what was original in his own work. But above all, I believe James's silence is a response to the popular failure of his book ... In spite of James's silence, one modern critic [Edward Stone, 1964] has named Macleod of Dare as a source for The Tragic Muse and several have named Miss Bretherton. The contrasting characters of the actress and her suitor seem to have been suggested by Black's book, while the plot of Miriam-Peter story seems to be derived from Mrs. Ward's ... When he wrote his own story of an actress, he not only took over Mrs. Ward's plot and characters but also examined the same theatrical issues she had and seconded her opinion.<sup>46</sup>

Clearly, Jacobson takes it for granted that James has incorporated or assimilated, from the other two novels, some material so essential that it still substructures his work. She also assumes that James is reticent about the trafficking he has done: James camouflages his 'cribbing' because of failure and success at the same time. Such criticism addresses intertextuality as if it were mere plagiarism. What Jacobson claims is nothing more than a misreading of the obvious, as in the case of the 'vagueness of remembrance'. She postulates that this is a cover up for 'story-smuggling'. But in fact it is about the direct and the indirect germs of the novel. What



James is trying to recollect is the enunciation of the idea of writing a novel about art, that is, the project itself, not the source of the material with which to fill it in.

The direct germ, which has always been mistaken for Mrs. Ward's anecdote as narrated in The Notebooks, has been unearthed by Peter Collister in his 'Mrs. Humphry Ward, Vernon Lee, and Henry James'. From the 'MS diary of Gertrude Ward, Humphry Ward's younger sister', he quotes the entry dated January 30th., 1884. Gertrude says that they have a party 'to meet Mary Anderson'. Henry James is among the celebrities. The actress leaves very soon, but James stays, as expected, for dinner. Gertrude adds,

Then we went to the play. Miss Anderson had lent us her box, so we were very near to the stage. The first piece was Pygmalion and Galatea - in which she was too beautiful for words; the second, Gilbert's new play Comedy & Tragedy, in which we all agreed that her part was grievously overdone: too excited, too loud, too [sic] restless; no self control, no dignity, no self possession. It was a pity for she is so lovely and had such capacities that she ought to be a first-rate actress. Mr. James was very amusing and almost annoying; he got so angry at her 'hysterics', and stormed and raved at such untrained, unfinished, inartistic acting. It was easy to see that he was used to the Parisian theatres.<sup>47</sup>

Collister then quotes the entry in James's Notebooks, and draws attention to the fact that it does not mention Gertrude's anecdote: 'The passage is well known, of course, for its relevance to The Tragic Muse, but it makes no reference to the incident which had provided the original idea - the afternoon

and the evening spent in Mary Anderson's company'.<sup>48</sup> Collister concludes that 'Both novelists were present at what we know to have been the "germ" for Miss Bretherton: the afternoon call, the visit to the Lyceum and the attendant disillusionment. We may conjecture that the occasion also witnessed the "unregistered and unacknowledged birth" of The Tragic Muse'.<sup>49</sup> It becomes clear now that James's 'vagueness of remembrance' is not a tactful silence, as Jacobson claims, but a 'genuine ellipsis of memory. What James cannot recall may not be what Mrs. Ward has told him but the Lyceum incident.

The issue could have developed into a very important debate had the critics seen it in the thematic context of the anxiety of influence in the novel, for this concept helps us come to grips with the possible relationships between one artist and another. What relates two writers or two texts is sometimes anxiety without influence, and sometimes influence without anxiety. And there is the higher formula, the anxiety of influence. The first model would apply to writers who fear that their contemporariness may seem banal, yet whose works are indeed original. The second model is the opposite. It refers to those artists who are so established and so masterly that they dare share the common topics or the 'public sphere' without showing any signs of anxiety. The third is, by definition, a conflict between a young artist and a canonized master, either contemporaries or from different generations.

The three patterns can be illuminated by Roland Barthes' map of the relationships between artists. In Writing Degree



Zero, he talks about the contemporariness of uncontemporary writers: 'Although separated by a century and a half, they use exactly the same instrument perhaps a little changed in outward appearance ... they have the same mode of writing'. Then he introduces the contrasting case. '[Other writers] who have shared or who share our language at the same stage of its historical development use utterly different modes of writing. Everything separates them: tone, delivery, purpose, ethos and naturalness of expression'. The conclusion is that 'to live at the same time and to share the same language is a small matter compared with modes of writing so dissimilar and so sharply defined by their dissimilarity'.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, T.S. Eliot, writing about James, differentiates between what might be called affiliation, and filiation. The latter is the anxiety of influence proper: 'there are certain writers whom he [James] consciously studied, of whom Hawthorne was not one; but in any case his relation to Hawthorne is on another plane from his relation to Balzac, for example'.<sup>51</sup>

In other words, writers happen to be contemporary in the flux of time. But this kind of floating juxtaposition does not necessarily frame them into ephebes and precursors. On the contrary, it is spatialization that generates real intertextuality. This is the case when latecomers relate like 'sons' to certain precursors. Here, as Barthes says, the relationship becomes more synchronic and technical rather than diachronic or topical. In the light of these distinctions, it

becomes clear that the conjunction between The Tragic Muse and the other two novels is not plagiarism, but influence without anxiety, as the following comparative study reveals.

Black's Macleod of Dare, to start with, can be summarized as the story of Macleod and Gertrude. He is a Northerner, a Highlander, and the only survivor among all his brothers. He is given the title of the Master of Castle Dare - a clue to the understanding of his character. Gertrude White, by contrast, is a Londoner and a professional actress. Her thirteen-year old sister is represented as being craftier and more self-conscious, which highlights Gertrude's limitations. Macleod visits London, where he becomes acquainted with the actress. He proposes to her and she accepts. But she changes her mind after her trip to his Gothic territory. Back in London, she is reported as about to marry Limuel, a fellow artist and a playwright. The news shakes the Highlands and shocks the Highlander. But Hamish, Macleod's butler, puts forward a plan which will restore things to order: abducting the actress. The two sail to London in Macleod's yacht, the *Umpire*, and manage to dupe Gertrude into the vessel. However, instead of returning straight to Castle Dare, they stop at a little island where Macleod has already wished to be buried. The Northern night, as expected, turns out treacherous and the boat sinks with the two on board. Significantly, Macleod obliges Gertrude to share a glass of black wine with him before the storm. This ending recalls one of the stories narrated in



the novel itself. It is about another Highlander who abducts a woman and drowns her screams by pipe music: Macleod of Dare is not an anomaly, after all, in the Highland of Romance.

Black's novel is clearly about the North-South divide. The world of romance, and the Gothic, is contrasted to that of realism and cynicism. This is actually how James views Macleod of Dare: 'It was perfectly competent to him [William Black] to attempt the portrait of a deep and simple nature, wrought upon by a grievous disappointment and converted into the likeness of one of his high-land ancestors. Macleod is meant for a man of strong and simple passions, a hero quite of the kind so highly appreciated by Stendhal, who loves, if he loves at all, with consuming intensity, and for whom a sentimental disappointment is of necessity a heartbreak'.<sup>52</sup> James thinks of the novel as a success, but he expresses his judgement in a way that attributes the grandeur to the nature of the subject itself, and to the fabula in particular. He says, 'The author has had the good fortune to lay his hand on a very picturesque and striking subject ... A thoroughly good subject is a fine thing and a rare thing but Macleod of Dare may boast of possessing it' (perhaps this is why he says 'competent to' not 'of').

Moreover, in his dispatch to the Nation, March 22nd, 1877, James satirizes William Black, and dismisses his exhibition of himself in Portrait: A Weekly Photograph and Memoir as a downright decline. James takes it for granted that he himself is the master: 'It seems a little unexpected, from the point of view of a fastidious taste, that Mr. Black should himself be

his exhibitor...' (my emphasis).<sup>53</sup> He concludes his review with a derisive quotation to the effect that Black has a scheme for 'a better government for the universe'. The two reviews establish the point that James writes about Black with a properly confident sense of authority and superiority. He is capable of eulogizing the other's subject without any sign of anxiety or inferiority. The Tragic Muse itself, when compared with Macleod of Dare will produce a similar contrast.

Detailed composition confirms such a reading, as in the case of Macleod and Peter. What seems to bring these closer at first sight is that both are romantic. But Macleod is romantic in the sense that he belongs to romance, whereas Peter has a romantic temperament. Hence Macleod's make-up is 'Rhadamanthine', whereas Peter's is reconcilable and detonizable. The first brings a collective death, but the second contributes to a collective deliverance. Furthermore, Macleod is 'actionally' centripetal. He comes into Gertrude's life like a whirlwind into a nest. Peter, by contrast, is centrifugal. When his matrimonial enterprise becomes obviously occluded, he turns his back on the novel and pilgrimages abroad. Macleod remains Highland-bound in terms of the Gothic ambience. But Peter, after reality 'bakes him brown', and punctures his romantic balloons, returns ready for reconciliation on polyphonic grounds. The ending of The Tragic Muse, as far as this realistic trajectory is concerned, does not sound related to Macleod of Dare, for it a revisionistic re-writing of Romeo and Juliet, which is brought into play in the text itself.



In theatrical terms, there is a further difference between Macleod and Peter. The first is represented as illiterate in histrionics. The only thing he voices in this respect is the tyranny of art, but he out-tyrannizes it. Peter, on the contrary, is a good critic of the theatre. His judgements about it, and about Miriam's performance, are the most reliable in the novel. Judith Funston confirms that 'As Miriam's interpreter, Peter is qualified and trustworthy because he is a sensitive, educated observer of the dramatic art'.<sup>54</sup> He distinguishes faces from masks, and fiction and reality. It may be said that Macleod is also aware of make-believe. Does he not stage the abduction of the actress, and by that does he not outsmart the theatre? The answer is simply that it is not Don Quixote, to whom Macleod is compared, who dramatizes the play within the novel. It is his butler, Hamish, a name that recalls Cervantes' Cide Hamete ben Engeli, who is in charge of the whole venture. (Cide Hamete is always referred to as the author of Don Quixote).<sup>55</sup> Clearly, Peter is not modelled on Macleod.

The same applies to Gertrude and Miriam. True both are actresses proposed to by mentor-like lovers, who want, to use Duncan Webster's words, to 'domesticate' the public woman and to withdraw her from circulation.<sup>56</sup> But it is also true that this conjunction does not stand too much inspection. Gertrude is an actress, who does not forget that she is a woman. She tells her father, 'I only showed you that even a popular actress sometimes remembers that she is a woman'.<sup>57</sup> Hence she turns out willing to get married twice in a very short period

(to Macleod and Limuel). The fear of becoming an Artemis puts paid to the actress in herself. No wonder when marriage is the issue, she fails to deal with it as theatrically as Miriam does. By contrast, Miriam is a woman, who always remembers that she is an actress. Hence the matrimonial possibility - marriage to Peter - proves unrealizable. Had it happened, the wife would have replaced the actress. Wedlock is a deadlock for Miriam unless the partner is genuinely polyphonic; that is, unless he accepts her as she really is. Therefore, she declines Peter's proposal, and quite rightly accepts Dashwood, who adds to her success.

This difference between the two actresses is due to a deeper structure. Gertrude desires a role-less position. She believes that marriage is the haven where she can be unself-conscious all the time. Commenting on her change of mind concerning Macleod's proposal, she says, 'I feel now as if I was called on to act a part from morning till night, whereas I was always assured that, if I left the stage and married him, it was to be my natural self and I should have no more need to pose and sham'.<sup>58</sup> In short, acting for Gertrude is 'going against the grain'. This anti-theatrical attitude explains why the stage is labyrinthine for her. She keeps complaining of feeling character-less, and of getting lost in the maze of masks. James, talking about her, says, 'the weak point of the tale is the figure of the heroine ... Gertrude White is not in the least the study of an actress, nor indeed, as it seems to us, the study of anything at all'.<sup>59</sup>



Miriam, unlike Gertrude, feels more at home the more masks she puts on. They are for her an impenetrable front behind which she is fully self-conscious and in control. Little wonder Gertrude can be duped by a character as simple as Hamish, whereas Miriam, whose very shoes are said to be theatrical, remains immune to all ploys. In fact, if Black's heroine is a part of the theatre, one gets the impression that the theatre is a part of Miriam. This arises from the antithesis between monologism and polyphony. A monologist's persona is always part of a larger whole, whereas a polyphonist's author-thinker envelops that whole itself. Talking about this difference, Bakhtin says, 'At a time when the self-consciousness of a character was usually seen merely as an element of reality, as merely one of the features of his integrated image, here [in Dostoevsky], on the contrary, all of reality becomes an element of the character's self-consciousness'.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, it can be said that Miriam is not Gertrude's acolyte, neither is Gertrude Miriam's Rachel.

Finally, the two novels themselves, when compared, will endorse this reading. Instead of Black's one story, one plot, and one-sided characters, James's novel has a plethora of plots, and a team of multi-dimensional characters. If Macleod of Dare is anti-theatrical, The Tragic Muse is undoubtedly a pro-theatrical work. The importance of this contrast arises from its bearing on the dramatization of the anxiety of influence within the book - something overlooked in a recent debate between Joseph Litvak and Jonas Barish.

The second, as quoted by the first, postulates that The Tragic Muse is an 'anomaly' in its contemporary literary scene, that is, in the nineteenth-century landscape of anti-theatricalism. It is, Barish purports, a unique 'instance' of pro-theatricalism. But Litvak comments that The Tragic Muse may have more in common with its anxious predecessors than Barish's account may suggest. James's novel, he argues, 'shares many of their misgivings centering not so much on the theatre itself as on the implicit theatricality of the novelistic enterprise'.<sup>61</sup> What is required here is coming to grips with influence, and the representation of continuity as discontinuity. Hence there should be a merger between the two critics, for The Tragic Muse, as Litvak argues, has some qualities in common with its contemporary works, and yet, as Barish suggests, it achieves originality. They converge in the public sphere, and diverge in the private one (influence without anxiety).

A similar contrast applies to the relationship between The Tragic Muse and Mrs. Ward's Miss Bretherton. It is documented in James's Notebooks (June 19th, 1884). But the entry itself demonstrates how instantly James perceives the limitations and the potential of the anecdote, and how he transforms it into a different material that recalls his own work, rather than another writer's. He narrates what Mrs. Ward has told him and what he will make from it. The entry starts with Mrs. Ward's voice, functioning as a fabula; and carries on with James's



voice, standing for the sjuzhet. The second interrupts the first, plays on it, modifies it and charts the new territory for James's own project. James says,

Mrs. Ward mentioned the other day to me an idea of hers for a story which might be made interesting - as a study of the histrionic character. A young actress is an object of too much attention and a great deal of criticism from a man who loves the stage (he oughtn't to be a professional critic), and finally, though she doesn't satisfy him at all artistically, loves the girl herself. He thinks something may be made of her, though he doesn't quite see what: he works over, gives her ideas, etc. Finally (she is slow in developing, though full of ambition), she takes one, and begins to mount, to become a celebrity. She goes beyond him, she leaves him looking after her and wondering. She begins where he ends - soars away and is lost to him. The interest, I say, would be as a study of a certain particular nature d'actrice: a very curious sort of nature to reproduce. The girl I see to be very crude, etc. The thing a confirmation of Mrs. Kemble's theory that the dramatic gift is a thing by itself - implying of necessity no general superiority of mind. The strong nature, the personal quality, vanity, etc., of the girl: her artistic being, so vivid, yet so purely instinctive. Ignorant, illiterate. Rachel (The Notebooks, pp. 63-4; my emphasis).

The italicized parts represent James's voice and his sudden reactive impact by which the naked anecdote undergoes artistic metamorphosis. This instant transformation demonstrates the absence of anxiety within influence. In fact, the germ above recalls The Tragic Muse not Miss Bretherton. James's novel itself, however scrutinized, rarely recalls Mrs. Ward's. This is simply because it has managed to go on where the other has come to a halt, and consequently, to be the real counter-sublime. The contrast between Isabel and Miriam will concretize such a reading.

The similarities between these two heroines are indeed too marginal to count. True both are beautiful actresses; are surrounded by an artistic ambience; have fine voices and share a predilection for recitation. But this common ground is washed away by the deluge of difference. Isabel is an 'ugly duckling' not only as others view her, but as she thinks of herself too. Instead of being aware of her possibilities, she is self-conscious only about her impossibilities. This crippling limitation makes her totally negative, and prevents her from being what James calls a 'pushy' actress.<sup>62</sup> The other characters know that she has no potential. Kendal, for example, believes that her only equipment, 'transient beauty', will not take her anywhere. Therefore, he pigeonholes her in the 'milk-maid' category, and does his best to prevent her from playing Elvira. Miriam, by contrast, is conscious of her potential. She knows that she is a real swan from the very beginning. This is why, as the novel demonstrates, even the 'impossible' is 'possible' in her career (Miriam's words).

Such a contrast makes clear why Isabel turns out apathetic and manipulable, whereas Miriam is always puppetization-proof, so to speak. It also puts into perspective the different impact each has in her novel. Isabel, though the work is entitled after her, is often represented in absentia. She rarely participates in dialogues; hardly demonstrates a capability for creativity or criticism, and remains a sort of a role-less heroine. But at the end of the novel, she is portrayed as a great success. The reader is supposed to take this ending



uncritically, for Isabel succeeds without any ordeal, complication, or menace of failure. She faces no Peter, no Nash, no Madame Carré, not even a Macleod of Dare.

By contrast, Miriam has to tame her antagonists, and to walk the tightrope to get to her destination. She manages to transform The Tragic Muse into a stage for herself, to make the other characters her permanent audience and, as Joseph Litvak points out, she proves too much for James: 'It is as if the "creature of the stage" somehow resisted James's attempt to dignify her as the presiding genius of the novel's compositional procedure, and "insisted" instead on a more unsettling kind of centrality characterized by the looseness, bagginess and monstrosity that James attempts to preclude by turning the theatre into a metaphor of "art at large"'.<sup>63</sup> Those who jeer at her in the beginning start to cheer her later on. The contrast between the two actresses is clear-cut. Acting is Isabel's flaw, but it is Miriam's forte. Therefore, to claim that Isabel is Miriam's precursor is to beg the question. One might say that Miriam is Isabel's belated mother.

The differences between the two actresses are paradigmatic of the contrast between the two novels, as James's letter (December 9th., 1884) demonstrates. In it, he explains to Mrs. Ward the shortcomings of Miss Bretherton, but he expresses himself in a way that delineates their different territories. After listing the complexities of representing the 'public woman', he tells Mrs. Ward that she has 'seen the concussion too simply - refused perhaps even to face it'. Instead, she has

limited herself to Isabel's 'respectability'. But while trying to 'preserve' this moral side, Mrs. Ward has 'sacrificed' the 'artistic' question. No wonder she 'mixes slightly incongruous things a little more than they would have been mixed in life'.<sup>64</sup> By evading the crux of the novel, sacrificing art to morality, and failing to come to the level of her raw material, Mrs. Ward has not satisfied even the 'ABC' of the novelistic enterprise. Hence it would have been more productive had critics focused on what James has refused to take from Mrs. Ward, instead of speculating about what he might have tried to hide.

This comparative study makes clear that, though the three novels meet in the 'public sphere', they are categorically different. The 'stained' Macleod of Dare reflects the Gothic inside. The 'plain' Miss Bretherton limits itself to the lisible outside. But the 'opaque' Tragic Muse performs the 'double obligation' towards the outside and the inside.<sup>65</sup> Using Bloom's different versions of influence, I would say that James's work, instead of being an inter-novel or another novel, is simply the 'Great' novel.

#### 4. How to Read The Tragic Muse

The three categories of the novel's critical reception are different attempts for reading The Tragic Muse. But, as has been demonstrated, they are doubly inadequate. They are unworkable and un-Jamesian, which explains the meagreness of their output, and their failure to make a real breakthrough in the prospects of the novel (something already emphasized by



W.R. Macnaughton and Tony Tanner). Hence the necessity of a different alternative. The new approach must be the kind of criticism that empties itself of all a priori judgements, gets saturated in the text, and brings to a close focus the work's major preoccupation. A major preoccupation is the one that engages all the characters, addresses the very narrative mode of the work, and comes to grips with the problematic thematized throughout the novel.<sup>66</sup>

The Tragic Muse bubbles over with the characters' own conflicts and anxieties. For most of them are confronted with the either-or situation: knuckle under or be an author-thinker. This is not different from 'publish or perish'; or from W.H. Auden's 'the responsible agent and the irresponsible victim [in James]'.<sup>67</sup> Lady Agnes, for instance, is represented as refusing to surrender to the coup de grace dealt her by fate (poverty and widowhood). Therefore, she tries to marry Nick to the rich Julia, and Biddy to the newly-promoted Peter. But this cannot be actualized without the proper plotting, the self-conscious novelization, and the transformation of the most natural sentiment, motherhood, into a stratagem, and vice versa. In short, her real problem is artistic: can the mother do the 'British matron'; or the 'British matron', the mother? Better still, can the mother do the mother? As will be seen, her failure arises from creative shortcomings.

Similarly, Julia Dallow, who wants to get married again, does not want a man who might be a replica of the late George. This story is complicated by the fact that Julia is an epitome

of the proud woman. Ironically, she is humanized by falling in love with Nick Dormer. The question is how she can make sure that Nick is not George? Even if he is not, how can she be in love without humbling herself? And how can she humble herself without undermining her pride? Her problem is obviously compositional. She needs to 'weave a web' which might accommodate both love and pride. What she embarks on is a narrative of politics, the hero of which is Nick himself. Like Lady Agnes, Julia's problem is also authorial, for the opacity of her second narrative verges on closure, and engenders the possibility of misreading.

Nick's problem is more complex than anything else, for he is embattled on all fronts. His mother has a design for him; Julia has another one; Carteret engages him too; and his precursor, Gabriel Nash, tries to pull him in a different direction. Even the 'gods' devise a trick for him: bedevilling his character with a schism between politics and art, and making him two persons in one. All these are fictions of power, for the mother is a powerful figure, and so are Julia, Nash and Carteret. The most powerful, of course, are the mocking gods. But instead of knuckling under, like Roderick Hudson, Nick fabulates a grand second narrative, and manages to contain the fiction of power with the power of his own fiction. Central to this reversal is Nick's seeing through the make-believe of his mother, the entangled web of Julia Dallow, the aesthetics of Nash and, most importantly, the 'preposterous' joke of the



gods. This repeated representation of the characters as doing what an author does not only makes them 'author-thinkers', but makes the novel a perfect example of polyphony.

Within this narrative arena the major conflict is thematized. It is what takes place between the young artists and the older ones. On the one hand there are Nick Dormer and Miriam Rooth. On the other, there are Gabriel Nash and Madame Carre. In the two cases, the ephebe replaces the precursor, and becomes the new authority. The difference between the two conflicts is that the Nick-Nash narrative is already over by the time they meet in the novel; whereas the Miriam-Carre wrestling begins and ends in the text itself. In fact, these two stories lend meaning to the other conflicts, and put the novel into its proper perspective. Lady Agnes, the dead father, Julia Dallow, Carteret, Mrs. Rooth, and Peter Sherringham are not only parents and lovers, but precursors and mentors, for Nick and Miriam. Hence it can be said that The Tragic Muse is a great rehearsal of the anxiety of influence.

Indeed, the Preface, the textual evidence, and the logic of the situation, call for such a focalization. James's description of the novel as being 'a poor fatherless, motherless' work suggests a certain anxiety that it might have a precursor (AN, p. 79).<sup>68</sup> The words, 'father' and 'mother' are central to the anxiety of influence. His well-known criticism of The Newcomes, Les Trois Mousquetaires, and War and Peace, as being 'large loose baggy monsters', which are artistically meaningless and structurally 'accidental' and 'arbitrary',

confirms his own perennial conflict with certain predecessors (AN,p.84). His humanization of the masters is a 'daemonization of the self, exactly as his ironization of their works is a canonization of his own. The other irony is that the precursor James is engaging in The Tragic Muse is not even mentioned in the polemic above. He is Shakespeare. Of course, this is not the first time James and Shakespeare are brought together.

William Stafford and Nicola Bradbury emphasize James's continuous 'tribute' to the bard. In his 'James Examines Shakespeare', Stafford surveys all James's references to his precursor: the early fascination, the reviews of different productions of the plays; 'The Birthplace' (the short story about Shakespeare), and James's introduction to The Tempest.<sup>69</sup> Stafford also refers to an incident that feeds back into the anxiety of influence. When James is commissioned to write the introduction to The Tempest, he replies, 'I will challenge this artist - the master and magician of a thousand masks, and make him drop them, if only for an interval'.<sup>70</sup>

Nicola Bradbury focuses on the 'Introduction to The Tempest, and comments in a way that confirms the anxiety of influence between James and Shakespeare: 'The very terminology of James's tribute to Shakespeare captures the balance of reverence and curiosity, in the poised ambiguity of his word "science", which indicates both knowledge and discovery'.<sup>71</sup> The scientific rendering of another artist is a euphemism for reducing that precursor to a formula, and for putting paid to his uniqueness and his 'magic' (James's word). As will be seen



later, this is not only central to the anxiety of influence as such, but to what James does to Shakespeare. Moreover, the 'reverence', which Nicola Bradbury quite rightly underlines, is the clearest sign of the completion of the anxiety of influence. As Bloom points out, once the ephebe establishes himself as the new Master, he piles tribute upon tribute to the precursor, pretends to return to the 'days of flooded apprenticeship', and seals his victory with 'reverence'. This is what Madame Carré does to her precursor, and what Miriam Rooth does to Madame Carré; and what James does at the end of his letter to Mrs. Ward (already quoted).

Once again, The Tragic Muse is a great register of the anxiety of influence between James and Shakespeare, as the overwhelming intertextuality demonstrates. For instance, instead of using some fictive play, James brings Romeo and Juliet self-consciously into the text. At the peak of her success, Miriam 'plays' Juliet. Her Romeo is Peter Sherringham. What happens here is not simply a reference to Shakespeare, for James is re-writing and recasting the play. Peter is abroad, and Romeo is exiled. Back at home, Juliet is playing the dead Juliet. Miriam is playing the dead woman, and the actress performing that role. Peter and Romeo return, in the same manner, towards the end. Romeo fails to distinguish life from death, or acting from reality, which causes his tragedy. Juliet pays for her performance. By contrast, Miriam's acting enlightens Peter. Although he realizes that she is no longer his, he does not commit suicide. Instead, he marries another woman.

The same thing applies to Nick Dormer and Julia Dallow. For their relationship, as will be seen in the next chapter, recalls, and supersedes, the story of Beatrice and Benedick in Much Ado about Nothing. Like their counterparts, they engage in a lot of ado and deception about whether or not to get married. But unlike their Shakespearean counterparts, Nick and Julia are not involved in a teasing affair. It is a matter of pride for Julia, and a question of art for Nick. Moreover, Nick and Julia, unlike Beatrice and Benedick, are not tricked into believing that they are in love with each other. On the contrary, they put off their marriage as a reaction to the others' interference. Their departure is substituting 'noting' for 'nothing', as will be seen later on. Hence their eventual rapprochement is not a theatrical trick, but a reconciliation of attitudes.

Wrestling with Shakespeare comes to a head in the intertextuality between The Tragic Muse and Hamlet. It is James himself, who alerts us to the kinship between the play and the novel (AN, p.90). The Preface suggests that Hamlet is just an example paradigmatic of what James is doing. What I want to add is that Hamlet is an ur-text, which James engages, diverges from, and re-writes. The constants of the play are kept in the novel. Shakespeare's main characters are King Hamlet, Gertrude and Prince Hamlet (father, mother, son). James's are Sir Nicholas, Lady Agnes and Nick. His Julia confirms that he has not forgotten Ophelia. Like the young Hamlet, Nick is named after his father. Old Hamlet is dead, and so is Sir Nicholas. But both fathers 'return to life' as ghosts. More



importantly, their 'resurrection' is informed by the same cause and the same purpose. King Hamlet comes back because of his wife, and so does Sir Nicholas. Moreover, the two have the same mission for their sons: the latter are commissioned to do for their fathers what the fathers themselves have failed to do. The mission is manifestly political in the two cases, for both parents have lost their political status. The King has lost his throne; and Sir Nicholas, the House of Commons. The first wants his son to kill the usurper, Claudius, and to be the new King. Similarly, the latter wants Nick to be, like him, a Member of Parliament. The missions confuse the two sons who, understandably, begin to 'Hamletize'. Nick cannot understand why he is made two persons in one; and his protests recall Hamlet's 'To be, or not to be' (III.i). After Hamletization comes action. Hamlet feigns madness, and stages the play within the play. Nick Dormer weaves a grand narrative, feigns interest in politics, and stages the election.

The multiplicity of similarities give a special importance to James's departures. The first disjunction is the disparity between Hamlet and Nick. The first gets enmeshed in his own design, loses Ophelia, and fails to survive the collective death which closes the play. By contrast, Nick wins the election, contains all the characters, and wins Julia without sacrificing her salon or his studio. The second departure is the re-orchestration of the 'family romance'. In Hamlet, the father co-opts the son for help against the mother. In The Tragic Muse, the mother co-opts the father against the son. In the first case, the focus is on the son and the mother; which

encourages reading the play in Freudian terms.<sup>72</sup> And the antagonism between the mother and the father endorses the narrative of cuckolding, and the immediate bearing on Shakespeare's personal life, something rehearsed in James Joyce's Ulysses. Harold Bloom, in his latest book, introduces a shift of focus, and reads Hamlet as a case for the anxiety of influence.<sup>73</sup> But in James's 'version of Hamlet', the focus is more clearly on the son as opposed to his parents, particularly the father. As Carteret puts it, the question is whether or not Nick will turn against Sir Nicholas. This is the anxiety of influence proper. Nick imitates his father, and supersedes him, by regaining the seat at the House of Commons. Then, in the manner of any successful ephebe, he swerves from Sir Nicholas, and sublimates himself into his own self by turning his back on politics, and going for art. In short, by re-angling the family romance into the anxiety of influence, James reveals his conflict with Shakespeare, and his triumph over him.

The Jamesian focus on the anxiety of influence is endorsed by his central departure from Shakespeare. In his versions of both Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet, James consistently removes death.<sup>74</sup> His Romeo (Peter), Juliet (Miriam), Hamlet (Nick) and Ophelia (Julia) do not die. Death, of course, is one of the most important aspects of Shakespeare's tragedies. It is the factor that makes the bard and his plays immortal for, without death, the tragedies will not be what they are. Hence by removing death, James is actually depriving the plays and the playwright of life; and is creating for himself and his works a chance for immortality. This puts into perspective Miriam's



protest against the 'pure tragedy' of the French theatre (TM, I, p. 346). It also lends meaning to Madame Carré's continuous attack on the English playwrights: Miriam turns her back on the French theatre; Madame Carré trivializes the English theatre; and Henry James sweeps the board. In the light of this great-scale wrestling with the bard (three plays contained in one novel), and the consistent subversion of his forte, the tragedies, one wonders whether the 'tragic muse', the title of the novel, is not a direct reference to Shakespeare.

However, 'humanizing' Shakespeare, or making him mortal, is nowhere clearer than in James's introduction to The Tempest. Here, James shrugs off the focus on Shakespeare the artist, and foregrounds Shakespeare the man: 'Here at last the artist is, comparatively speaking, so generalised, so consummate and typical ... The man everywhere, in Shakespeare's work, is so effectually locked up'. Then he represents the man as the real enigma: 'So it is then; and it puts it in a nutshell the eternal mystery, the most insoluble that ever was, the complete rupture, for our understanding between the Poet and the Man'. He concludes that the 'secret that baffles us' is 'the secret of Man'<sup>75</sup>. The function of this stratagem becomes clear the moment the reader recalls that the turning point in the anxiety of influence between a latecomer and a precursor is when the ephebe manages to 'generalize away' the uniqueness of the Master. For such an act, no matter what form it takes, will define the forebear out of the literary institution. And the greatest form of such a function is the reference to the

Master, not as an artist, but as a man or a woman. By saying that Shakespeare the artist is 'so generalised ... and typical', and by describing him as being a 'man', James is doubling the stereotyping, and is repressing the anxiety for good. For Shakespeare is a source of anxiety, but 'Mr. Shakespeare is not (Ap, p.13).

It may be said that the word 'man' above still sounds unique and enigmatic, and is far from being a stereotype. The best answer is James's letter to Violet Hunt in which he refers to Shakespeare in a way that confirms that 'man' is a stratagem of stereotyping. The letter is dated August 26th., 1903:

I am 'a sort of' haunted by the convention that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practised on a patient world. The more I turn him round and round the more he affects me. But that's all - I am not pretending to treat the question [Shakespeare or Bacon?] or to carry it any further. It bristles with difficulties, and I can only express my general sense by saying that I find it almost as impossible to conceive that Bacon wrote the plays as to know the man from Stratford, as we know the man from Stratford, did.<sup>76</sup>

As will be seen in the following chapters, James's young artists, like James himself, consistently generalize away the uniqueness of their precursors. Miriam Rooth calls the French actress a 'woman'. The narrator of 'The Author of Beltraffio' and Paul Overt in 'The Lesson of The Master' do not represent their precursors as artists, but as 'stockbrokers', 'book-keepers' and 'henpecked husbands'. The best way, however, for undoing the precursor is, as James says, to



possess one's possession. And for this end, there is nothing like what Bloom calls turning the predecessor into a character or a model. Nick Dormer asks Nash to sit to him; Miriam Rooth asks Madame Carré to recite for her; Paul Overt, the ephebe, intends to write a book about Henry St. George; the narrator of 'Beltraffio' tells the story of Mark Ambient; Hugh turns Dencombe into one of his patients; and Henry James himself writes a short story, 'The Birthplace', about the 'divine William'. Clearly, this wrestling with Shakespeare is not unexpected from James at this stage - the time of writing The Tragic Muse (1890) - for he was about to embark on his theatrical career. And to begin to write plays one has to 'sort of' write off Shakespeare first.

The major conflict with Shakespeare confirms the priority of the anxiety of influence in The Tragic Muse. But this theme is not limited to the indirections of the text, for it is thematized as the novel's major preoccupation : the 'agon' between the ephebes and their precursors. Once looked at this way, the novel's structural symmetry, and all its skeletal parallelisms will come to the light. The militant Miriam, for instance, has a defeated mother, a romantic mentor, and a pugnacious predecessor. By contrast, Nick has a determined mother, a realistic mentor, and a humanized precursor. It will be interesting to find out if these correspondences structure the future of the characters. Will Nick, for example, approach his mother exactly as Miriam has overpowered hers? Will Miriam overtake Madame Carré in the same way as Nick has contained Nash? Will the parent-figures resort to similar methodology, or

will they exchange places? In other words, do the 'real' parents deploy artistic or inartistic paraphernalia to puppetize their sons and daughters? And do the artistic precursors use parental or 'unparental' ploys to victimize their ephebes?

Undoubtedly, to saturate oneself in The Tragic Muse is to come out with the conclusion that polyphony, as a narrative mode, and the anxiety of influence, as a theme, are central to it. Hence the next chapter will address itself in detail to the two issues: repertoire, codification, and performance.



- <sup>1</sup>W.W. Robson, 'Henry James's The Tragic Muse', Mandrake (1954-5), 281-95 (p.281).
- <sup>2</sup>T. Tanner, ed., Henry James: Modern Judgements (London, 1969), p.14.
- <sup>3</sup>W.R. Macnaughton, 'In Defence of James's The Tragic Muse', Henry James Review, 7 (1985), 5-12 (p.5).
- <sup>4</sup>H. James, The Scenic Art: Notes on Acting and the Drama, 1872-1901 (London, 1949), p.119.
- <sup>5</sup>D.J. Gordon and John Stokes, 'The Reference of The Tragic Muse' in The Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James, edited by J. Goode (London, 1972), pp. 81-167 (p. 122).
- <sup>6</sup>T.S. Eliot, 'In Memory', in The Question of Henry James, edited by F.W. Dupee (London, 1947), 123-6 (p.125).
- <sup>7</sup>R. Poirier, The Comic Sense of Henry James: A study of the Early Novels (London, 1967; first published, 1960), p.9.
- <sup>8</sup>D. Maini, 'The Politics of Henry James', Henry James Review, 6 (1985), 158-81 (p.165).
- <sup>9</sup>M. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, translated by Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature, 8 (Manchester, 1984), pp.3-4.  
('Literature on Dostoevsky has focused primarily on the ideological problems raised by his work ... Critics are apt to forget that Dostoevsky is first and foremost an artist ... and not a philosopher or a publicist'.)
- <sup>10</sup>M. Jacobson, Henry James and the Mass Market (Tuscaloosa, Alabama University Press, 1983), p.63.
- <sup>11</sup>D. Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James (Cambridge, 1962), p.63.
- <sup>12</sup>'In Defence of James's The Tragic Muse', p.7.
- <sup>13</sup>L. Powers, 'James's The Tragic Muse - Ave Atque Vale', PMLA, 73 (1958), 270-4 (p.270).
- <sup>14</sup>Henry James and the Mass Market, pp. 72-3.
- <sup>15</sup>W.F. Hall, 'Gabriel Nash: "Famous Centre" of The Tragic Muse', Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 21 (1966-7), 167-84 (p.182).
- <sup>16</sup>S. Perosa, Henry James and the Experimental Novel (New York, 1983), p.40.
- <sup>17</sup>Henry James and the Mass Market, pp.5-6.
- <sup>18</sup>H. Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century, introduced by M. Bradbury (London, 1988; first published, 1913), pp.xi-xii.
- <sup>19</sup>L. Edel, ed., The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel by Henry James (Westport, Conn., 1976; first published, 1957), p.48.
- <sup>20</sup>The House of Fiction, p.51.
- <sup>21</sup>The House of Fiction, p.53.
- <sup>22</sup>The House of Fiction, p.112.
- <sup>23</sup>See J.E. Miller, Jr., 'Henry James: A Theory of Fiction', Prairie Schooner, 45 (1971).
- <sup>24</sup>W.J. Bate, The Burden of the Past and the English Poet (London, 1970), p.95.
- <sup>25</sup>See John L. Kimmey, 'The Tragic Muse and Its Forerunners', American Literature, 41 (1969-70), 518-31.  
('The Tragic Muse, then, besides being about the individual at odds with the world in which he lives ...



- is more significantly 'about the meaning of art for the artist', p.530.)
- 26 K. Graham, Henry James: The Drama of Fulfilment, an Approach to the Novels (London, 1975), p.282.
- 27 Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p.31.
- 28 See M. Bell, ed., The Context of English Literature: 1900-1930 (London, 1980), p.1.  
('Literature undeniably reflects in some sense the life and thought of its time ... but its value as literature is not in any simple sense contingent on such a criterion. The vitality or meaningfulness of literature hinges on its internal intensity rather than the quantity of historical information in a factual sense that it may include.')
- 29 'The Reference of The Tragic Muse', pp. 122, 163.
- 30 H. James, Picture and Text (New York, 1893), p.65.
- 31 The Scenic Art, p.93.
- 32 D. Smit, The Language of a Master: Theories of Style and the Late Writing of Henry James (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), p.17.
- 33 'Henry James's The Tragic Muse', p.282.
- 34 The Complete Plays of Henry James, edited by L. Edel (London, 1949), p.40.
- 35 L. Edel, 'Introduction' to The Tragic Muse (New York, 1960), p.XIV.
- 36 See The Language of a Master: Theories of Style and the Late Writing of Henry James.  
('James' discourse naturally falls into two categories: journal entries, letters, plays, and the first drafts of short stories which James wrote out longhand, and full-length novels and the revision of the short stories which he dictated to the typist [Theodora Bosanquet]', p.67. And 'The letters and journal entries contain on average much shorter sentences, many more active agents as subjects, considerably more active verbs, a more direct forceful syntax, and fewer of the mannerisms we associate with James' novels and stories', pp.68-9.)
- 37 'The Reference of The Tragic Muse', p.147.
- 38 See S. Gorley Putt, A Reader's Guide to Henry James (London, 1966), p.21.  
('... to the ordinary reader the unspoken question about a writer's characters must always be not "Where do they come from?" but rather "How well are they now presented?" Too many critical studies leave us unwittingly, with the notion that it is all simply explained: this character comes from Uncle Bert, that from Becky Sharp, and that's all there's to it ... What comes of it? Nothing.')
- 39 L. Powers, 'Mr. James's Aesthetic Mr. Nash - Again', Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 13 (1958-9), 341-9 (p.343).
- 40 'Mr. James's Aesthetic Mr. Nash', 344.
- 41 Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p.285.
- 42 R. Baker, 'Gabriel Nash's "House of Idols": Aestheticism in The Tragic Muse', Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 15 (1973), 149-66 (p.151).
- 43 Henry James and the Mass Market, pp.74-5.
- 44 R. Wallace, 'Gabriel Nash: Henry James's Comic Spirit',



- Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 28 (1973-4), 220-4 (p.220).
- 45 For the history of the term, see T.E. Morgan, 'Is There an Intertext in This Text?: Literary and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Intertextuality', American Journal of Semiotics, 3 (1985), 1-40.  
(An important survey of twelve major theories of intertextuality)
- 46 Henry James and the Mass Market, pp.66-7.
- 47 P. Collister, 'Mrs. Humphry Ward, Vernon Lee, and Henry James', Review of English Studies, 31 (1980), 315-21 (p.319).
- 48 'Mrs. Humphry Ward, Vernon Lee, and Henry James', p.320.
- 49 'Mrs Humphry Ward, Vernon Lee, and Henry James', p. 321.
- 50 R. Barthes, Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology (London, 1984), p.15.
- 51 T. S. Eliot, 'The Hawthorne Aspect', in The Question of Henry James, edited by F. W. Dupee (London, 1947), pp. 127-33 (p.128).
- 52 H. James, 'Macleod of Dare', in Henry James: Literary Criticism, Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers, edited by L. Edel (New York, 1984), pp.737-40 (p.739).
- 53 'Macleod of Dare', p.737.
- 54 J. Funston, '"All Art Is One": Narrative Technique in Henry James's Tragic Muse', Studies in the Novel, 15 (1983), 344-55 (p.351).
- 55 See 'Faithful Johannes', in The Penguin Complete Grimm's Tales for Young and Old (London, 1984; first published, 1977), pp.22-8.  
(Hamish's performance recalls, almost literally, Johannes' role. This faithful servant draws a plot to abduct the Princess of the Golden Roof so that his master, the king, can possess her. They sail to her palace. The king, like Macleod, stays on the ship, whereas Johannes, like Hamish, lures the Princess into the vessel. This puts Macleod of Dare further into perspective.)
- 56 D. Webster, 'Representing the Economy and the Economies of Representation: Readings in the Fiction and Criticism of Henry James' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Warwick, 1984), pp.268-9.
- 57 W. Black, Macleod of Dare (London, 1886), p.141.
- 58 Macleod of Dare, p.330.
- 59 'Macleod of Dare', p. 739.
- 60 Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p.48.
- 61 J. Litvak, 'Actress, Monster, Novelist: The Tragic Muse As a Novel of Theatricality', Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 29 (1987), 141-68 (p.142).
- 62 See The Scenic Art, p.142.  
( 'The feminine side, in all the London theatres, is regrettably weak...')
- 63 'Actress, Monster, Novelist', p.145.
- 64 Henry James's Letters, edited by Leon Edel, 4 vols. (London, 1974-84), III, pp.58-60.
- 65 See Ortega y Gasset, 'The Dehumanization of Art', in Velasquez Goya and the Dehumanization of Art (London, 1972), pp.65-83.  
(He uses the same imagery to distinguish the traditional discourse from the modernist novel.)

- <sup>66</sup>See G. Poulet, 'The Phenomenology of Reading', New Literary History, 1 (1969-70), 53-68; and J. Hillis Miller, 'The Geneva School', in Modern French Criticism: From Proust and Valéry to Structuralism, edited by J.K. Simon (Chicago, 1972), pp.277-310.
- <sup>67</sup>W.H. Auden, 'Henry James and the Artist in America', Harper's Magazine, 197 (July, 1948), 36-40 (p.37).
- <sup>68</sup>John L. Kimmey, in 'The Tragic Muse and Its Forerunners', argues that without the Bostonians (1886) and The Princess (1886), 'James would never have written the novel that he did or have achieved in it the art that he wrought by profiting from their mistakes', p.519. Thais E. Morgan, in 'Is There an Intertext in This Text?', draws attention to the intertextuality 'among earlier and later texts by the same author', p.3.)
- <sup>69</sup>W.T. Stafford, 'James Examines Shakespeare: Notes on the Nature of Genius', PMLA, 73 (March, 1958), 123-8.
- <sup>70</sup>'James Examines Shakespeare', p.124.
- <sup>71</sup>N. Bradbury, Henry James: The Later Novels (Oxford, 1979), p.4.
- <sup>72</sup>See L. Lerner, Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism (London, 1983; first published, 1963).
- <sup>73</sup>H. Bloom, Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1989), pp.53-64.
- <sup>74</sup>See Mary McCarthy, Ideas and the Novel (London, 1980), p.5. ('When you think of James in the light of his precursors, you are suddenly conscious of what is not there: battles, riots, tempests, sunrises, the sewers of Paris, crime, hunger, the plague, the scaffold ...')
- <sup>75</sup>H. James, 'Introduction to The Tempest', in Henry James: Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers, pp.1205-20 (pp.1209, 1215, 1220).
- <sup>76</sup>The Letters of Henry James, edited by P. Lubbock, 2 vols. (New York, 1970; first published, 1920), I, p.424.



CHAPTER THREEPolyphony and Influence  
in The Tragic Muse

'The mere aesthetic instinct  
of mankind ...!'

(Merton Densher)

The Tragic Muse, as suggested in Chapter Two, is a polyphonic work the major preoccupation of which is the anxiety of influence. This description is called for by the complete correspondence between the novel's narrative mode and the generic repertoire of polyphony on the one hand, and the centrality of the ephebe-precursor dialogism on the other. Bakhtin explains that the poetics of polyphony comprises a set of principles with a special reference to the characters. He states that, unlike the mono-dimensional personae of homophonic literature, the characters in a polyphonic discourse tend to be dialogic or double-voiced. The one-to-one relationship between the character and the self is a monologic mode sloughed off by Dostoevsky, who 'In every voice ... could hear two contending voices'.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, most of the characters in The Tragic Muse are, in this sense, polyphonic. Nick, the clearest case, keeps complaining that he is two in one. Politics and art speak through him as loudly as do his father and his mentor. 'The difficulty', he says, 'is that I'm two men; it's the strangest thing that ever was ... I'm two quite distinct human beings, who have scarcely a point in common' (I, p. 244).

Similarly, Julia Dallow, a proud woman, is bedevilled by the ambivalence between love and hubris. She does not know whether to 'cast sheep's eyes', or her whip, at her beloved. Lady Agnes, an even prouder one, has to choose between being the matriarch or the mendicant. As W.W. Robson says, she 'represents the impoverished governing class, and her "sense of reality" is defined in terms of the relationship between family pride and economic need'.<sup>2</sup> Peter Sherringham is no exception. The dichotomy between his career and his careering (after Miriam) makes him ambivalent too. The discrepancy between diplomacy and romanticism, being a sort of a rational Romeo, renders him double-voiced throughout the novel.

The function of such a dialogism arises from the way it distinguishes a monologistic character from a polyphonic one. In monologism, the *dramatis personae* are made show of, and victimized, as if they were puppets or pawns. In polyphony, characters are represented as being self-conscious about the logic of things and, more importantly, they are capable of transforming that situation into its own antidote. They can 'manage' and 'combinare', as Juliana Bordereau says. Bakhtin, commenting on Ivan Karamazov's ideological discourse, says, 'It is not a judgement about the world but rather a personal nonacceptance of the world, a rejection of it, addressed to God as the guilty party responsible for the world order'.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, characters take such an attitude, implicitly or explicitly, at the very beginning of their stories, for they are represented as being fully self-conscious from that moment. The polyphonic novel, as demonstrated in the analysis of The



Aspern Papers, is neither a Bildungsroman nor a "crescendo unfolding" of "anagnorisis." Bakhtin emphasizes that the polyphonic 'heroes' know everything from the outset, and need only make their choice from among fully available semantic material'.<sup>4</sup>

Nick Dormer, for instance, views himself as the game of the gods or the sport of some story-teller. He is surprised to find himself called to canvas although no member of his family has ever been murmured to by a muse. What maddens him, to be more accurate, is not art or being an artist. On the contrary, it is the mode of the mission, that is, the commission. The manner in which it is imposed on him is the epitome of monologism. No wonder he exclaims, 'I'm a freak of nature, and a sport of the mocking gods. Why should they go out of their way to worry me? Why should they do everything so inconsequent, so improbable, so preposterous? It's the vulgarest practical joke. There has never been anything of the sort among us' (I, p. 181). The same antagonism to the homophonic 'framing' is sounded by Julia Dallow. She wonders why the agents of omniscience keep aborting her life with the same Procrustean narrative: "Why should it always be put upon me? What have I done? I was drenched with it before" (II, p. 77).

Julia's analeptic reference to her past emphasizes an important polyphonic dimension: the history of the character. Characters are not represented as being pastless, for that would go against the first "commandment" of polyphony: verisimilitude. In 'The Art of Fiction', James argues that

'the novel is history'.<sup>5</sup> Hence the characters are portrayed as having experiences predating the enunciation of the text. As a matter of fact, the teleology of history is not limited to the engineering of the 'realistic effect', for the past that persists through the present is central to the prolepsis of the characters. It functions as the genesis of, and the anterior fabula for, the posterior sjuzhet. Talking about the present preterite, Bakhtin explains that the characters 'remember from their own past only that which has not ceased to be present for them, that which is still experienced by them: an unexpected sin, a crime, an unforgiven insult'.<sup>6</sup>

This dimension is central to the structure of The Tragic Muse. For most of the characters have an analeptic story which is repeatedly narrated in the text, and is significantly allocated the diegetic level of the first narrative. Lady Agnes, for instance, has been reduced from the security of abundance to the humiliation of dependence. The reversal is made more complicated by bereavement - Sir Nicholas dies. The point is that this history is not limited to the past, for its bearing on the present is central to the novel. As early as Chapter Two, Lady Agnes tells Grace that Sir Nicholas's bankruptcy has killed him. And as late as Chapter Thirty-Nine, she brings that story to the fore again. After an elliptical 'You don't know...' to Peter, she concretizes her sentiment, saying, 'You don't know what my life with my great husband was' (II, p. 228). Of course, the full impact of the past is resurrecting the husband, and transforming him into a persona in her plot to domineer over Nick.



Similarly, the past for Julia Dallow is still the pivot of her present. Her marriage to George has been a failure. He has made her a decorative 'homebody' with no voice and no functional role. That ur-narrative is still so real to her that it informs all her performance. This is why she postpones her marriage to Nick. She wants to make sure first that he is not a replica of George. Nick understands her point of view, as the narrator reports: 'Nick could as quickly discern in them [her words] the uncalculated betrayal of an old irritation, an old shame almost - her late husband's flat inglorious taste for pretty things'. The narrator annotates the incident, saying that 'This had been the humiliation of her youth, and it was indeed a perversity of fate that a new alliance should contain for her even an oblique demand for the same spirit of accommodation, impose on her the secret bitterness of the same concessions' (II, p. 73). The diction describing Julia's history, 'irritation', 'old shame', and 'humiliation', recalls almost literally Bakhtin's concretization of the present preterite.

Even the younger characters have an analeptic chapter that has a specific bearing on their narrative possibilities. Miriam's past, for instance, is central to her career, and ambivalently so. For her earlier experience can be either the basis, or the deconstructive nucleus, of her future. Its importance, however, is signified by its frequency in the novel, and the duration given it in Chapter Four. Here, Nash, who has launched the Rooths, narrates their history to the rest of the characters. The father, a 'brocanteur', has been a successful business man. The mother, unlike the father, is not

business-minded. She has squandered all the capital her husband has left her, which has predestined Miriam to a social straitjacket. But she has given Miriam the basics of her future career: a cosmopolitan education and a knowledge of many languages. Furthermore, Mrs. Rooth, who is a dedicated reader, has introduced something else in Miriam's Life: fiction, and acting. Clearly, the two aspects - 'downtown' and 'uptown' - can relate to each other either emphatically or subversively.

The outcome hinges on Miriam's position. As the text demonstrates, she is acutely self-conscious about her past. For instance, instead of forgetting the financial straitjacket, she turns it into a strong motivation, and an epic of destitution. Indeed she never stops narrating anecdotes about it. In Chapter Eleven, for instance, she confides to Peter that they have been to dehumanizing places only to 'save fire and candles at home' (I, p.199). Hence her quest for money. She manages to remedy their poverty, and to follow successfully in the footsteps of her father. But this would not have been possible had it not been for the mother's influence. For Miriam does not become a 'brocanteur', but an actress. As a hybrid, she not only sustains the two voices of her parents, but supersedes them too.

Nick's position is more delicate. Unlike Miriam's, his parents do not have different temperaments. Both prioritize politics over anything else. Hence his accounts, which predate the novel, are mainly political. Once, he has won the election and become a Member of Parliament. The irony is that the House



has been dissolved before the first session, which subverts his success. On another occasion, he has failed to regain his seat. The death of the father raises the possibility that Nick must step in the footsteps of the deceased. The mother sets herself the task of bringing this about. But Sir Nicholas and Lady Agnes are not the only inhabitants of Nick's past. There is also Gabriel Nash, who has made Nick realize that he is not born for politics, but for art. Moreover, Gabriel Nash, like Sir Nicholas, comes back into Nick's life. Consequently, Nick's future becomes a dialectic between what he really is, and the role he is commissioned to play. Leon Edel describes this cul de sac, saying, 'James thus arrays against Nick Dormer's artistic inclinations all the forces which, in such circumstances, could destroy volition in any young man - family, father, tradition, maternal strength, political friendship, and even public demand'.<sup>7</sup>

What goes on between Nick and his family, or Miriam and hers, brings to the fore another tenet of polyphony: the conflict between the typical and the individual. Monologism attributes everything and everybody to the omniscient, ubiquitous ONE, be it the author, the patriarch, or the precursor as such. Nick is supposed to be Sir Nicholas exactly as Biddy and Grace are Lady Agnes. Worse still, there should be only the father on the male side, exactly as there is only the matriarch on the female front. Biddy is marginal, and Grace is 'trace', as the text demonstrates. In polyphony, the case is diametrically different. The singular is collectivized, and the type is individualized so that the character becomes 'we' in

miniature; and the plural, a heteroglot multiplicity of 'I's'. In his introduction to Bakhtin, Wayne Booth comments on this polyphonic premise, stating that 'To me it seems clearly to rest on a vision of the world as essentially a collectivity of subjects who are themselves social in essence, not individuals in any sense of the word'.<sup>8</sup> This principle of characterization, which reverberates throughout James's fiction, is central to The Tragic Muse, in which the disjunction between the monologic typification and the polyphonic individuation is foregrounded in the first sentence.<sup>9</sup> The conflict becomes more complicated as the text unfolds. The ending, however, is significantly neither a 'typical' triumph nor an eccentric ecstasy, but a polyphonic formula which facilitates the marriage between Peter and Biddy, and the rapprochement between Julia and Nick.

The novel's first sentence is: 'The people of France have made it no secret that those of England, as a general thing; are to their perception an inexpressive and speechless race, perpendicular and unsociable, unaddicted to enriching any bareness of contact with verbal or any other embroidery' (I, p.3). The statement offers a typified perception of both the French and the English - a device that permeates Nash's idiolect. The narrator, after sounding this major note, substantiates his premise with an English case - a performance that allies him to the French focalization: 'This view [that the British are a speechless race] might have derived encouragement ... from the manner in which four persons sat together in silence in the garden... of the Palais de l'Industrie' (I, p.3). The function of this annotation is to



represent the Dormers' typicality as being two-fold: British, and members of the same family. This will be the synthesis no matter how the logic of the discourse is taken: induction or deduction. However, whether the narrator is subjective, or submerging his subjectivity into a syntax of the objective, the concept of the type is at once used, highlighted and dislodged.

The typifying representation of the Dormers is injected with its own opposite, which suggests that the birth of individuality is inevitable. For the single family is not one whole after all. The family, as Gordon and Stokes emphasize, 'are characterized by their "Englishness"'.<sup>10</sup> And it is from within this double typicality, family and nationality, that the process of breaking up takes place. For what the narrator observes is not one whole but 'four persons' sitting together. The quantitative term suggests some distinctions and boundaries that make the family separable and individualizable. In other words, there should be, at the core of the type, an intrinsic factor which is anti-typical. It is a divergent centrifugal force that deconstructs the convergent centripetality of the type. In terms of the narrative medium, this is reflected in the mode of polyphony, which entails the co-existence of multiple voices and consciousnesses in the same text, as Nick's epiphany demonstrates. He 'had become aware ... that life is crowded and passion restless, accident and community inevitable. Everybody with whom one had relations had other relations too and indifference was a mixture and detachment a compromise' (II, 269).

The polyphonic performance of The Tragic Muse is endorsed by James. In the Preface, he emphasizes a set of compositional recollections that correspond to the Bakhtinian poetics. For instance, he recalls that 'From the moment I made out ... my lucky title, that is from the moment Miriam Rooth herself had given it me, so this young woman had given me with it her own position in the book' (AN,p.88). James is clearly talking about the character launching the author. Indeed, this is not the first time he speaks this language, for in the Preface to The American he gives the impression that Newman has given him the subject, exactly as it is Isabel Archer who has given him The Portrait of a Lady. In the Preface to the latter, he says, 'I could think so little of any fable that it didn't need its agents positively to launch it' (AN,p.44).

In the same Preface, James quotes from Ivan Turgenev 'in regard to his own experience of the usual origin of the fictive picture'. He recollects that 'It began for him almost always with the vision of some person or persons, who hovered before him, as the active or passive figure, interesting him and appealing to him just as they were and by what they were. He saw them, in that fashion as disponibles' (AN,pp.42-3). The epithet 'disponible' appears again in the Preface to The Princess Casamassima in a context analogous to Turgenev's. Here, James talks about the 'extremely disponible figure of Christina Light whom I had ten years before left on my hands at the conclusion of Roderick Hudson. She had for so long, in the vague limbo of those ghosts we have conjured but not exorcized, been looking for a situation, awaiting a niche and a function'



(AN,p.73). Of course, the word 'vision', in Turgenev's anecdote, is central here, for the whole issue, as I see it, has to do with the quality of the artist's mind, the way he envisions his own creativity, and the manner in which he relates himself both to his fiction, and to the representation of the characters. Commenting on the Turgenev-factor, Edel says that 'it confirmed James in his own way of story-telling. He, too, began with personages' (LHJ,I,p.439).<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, since it is Miriam, who has polyphonically launched the author, it is expected that he will relate to her in the same Bakhtinian way. In other words, he is not supposed to drown her character, or to anatomize it. This is why he neither 'go[es] behind' her, nor establishes headquarters inside her head. On the contrary, he tries to approach her as objectively as possible. Critics, unaware of this polyphonic logic of the technique, misread the narrative mode and interpret it as a condemnation of Miriam. They claim that it is a clear evidence of her second-hand role, and minor character. Alan Bellringer, for instance, unwittingly quotes Quentin Anderson, who says, 'to invade Miriam's consciousness would be to treat a part of her which is not histrionic'. Then he (mis)reads this as a testimony suggesting that Miriam's 'mind is too undeveloped and second-hand to serve as one of James's fine "registers or reflectors" of experience'.<sup>12</sup>

What Bellringer is not aware of is that representing Miriam through the other characters will engender another polyphonic mechanism repeatedly emphasized by Bakhtin. It is

the interplay between the characters, the dialogism of the multiple voices, and the authorial recession. Bakhtin explains that 'in Dostoevsky, consciousness never gravitates toward itself but is always found in intense relationship with another consciousness'. He adds, 'polyphony is precisely what happens between various consciousnesses, that is, their interaction and interdependence'. Elsewhere, he articulates the issue more clearly: 'I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance).'<sup>13</sup> Is not this exactly what James has in mind when he talks about the fusion and the interplay of the different stories in The Tragic Muse?

Well, the pleasure of handling an action (or, otherwise expressed, of a 'story') is at the worst for the storyteller, immense, and the interest of such a question as for example keeping Nick Dormer's story his and yet making it also and all effectively in a large part Peter Sherringham's, of keeping Sherringham's his and yet making it in its high degree his kinsman's, too, and Miriam Rooth's into the bargain; just as Miriam Rooth's is by the same token quite operatively his and Nick's, and just that each of the young men, by an equal logic, very contributively hers - the interest of such a question, I say, is ever so considerably the interest of the system on which the whole thing is done (AN, pp.88-9).

The interplay above is not possible without the multiplicity of consciousnesses (see John Goode in Chapter One). James is aware of the logic of the system: 'No character in a play (any play not a mere monologue) has ... a usurping consciousness; the consciousness of others is exhibited exactly



in the same way as that of the "hero"'. To demonstrate his point, he significantly brings Hamlet and Shakespeare into play: 'the prodigious consciousness of Hamlet, the most capacious and most crowded ... only takes its turn with that of the other agents of the story, no matter how occasional these may be'. By analogy, like the consciousness of any character in Hamlet, 'Miriam's might without inconsequence be placed on the same footing [as 'Nick's' and 'Peter's']' (AN,p.90). The actualization of these premises requires a polyphonic form. James confirms that the whole project will 'get itself done [not will be done] in dramatic, or at least in scenic conditions' (AN,p.90).<sup>14</sup>

James distinguishes between 'drama' and 'dramatization', exactly as Bakhtin differentiates between 'drama' and 'dramatic visualization'. For Bakhtin, the first is always monologic, but the second is polyphonic.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, like James, he considers the 'scenic method' one of the few devices for eliminating the authorial ubiquity, and 'polyphonizing' the novel. Interestingly enough, at the end of his Preface to What Maisie Knew, James uses an analogy that Bakhtin might well have quoted because it comprises both the musical etymology of polyphony and the dramatic orchestration of the novel: 'The treatment by "scene", regularly, quite rhythmically recurs ... each of the agents, true to its function, taking up the theme from the other very much as the fiddles, in an orchestra, may take it up from the cornets and flutes, or the wind-instruments take it up from the violins' (AN,pp.157-8). This close

correspondence between James and Bakhtin confirms the consistent and self-conscious polyphony of the oeuvre in general, and The Tragic Muse in particular.

But the question now arises of the teleology of the polyphonic mode. Bakhtin says that the purpose is 'to force out of them [the characters] that ultimate word of a self-consciousness pushed to its extreme limits'. This perspective permits the author 'to take all that is merely material; merely an object, all that is fixed and unchanging, all that is external and neutral in the representation of a person and dissolve it in the realm of the hero's self-consciousness and self-utterance'.<sup>16</sup> The synthesis of the last two constituents, self-consciousness and self-utterance, is at the heart of Dostoevsky's narrative mode: the transformation of the characters from auxiliaries into author-thinkers. Consequently, criticism, after focusing on the premises of polyphony, as manifested in the poetics of the author, should address itself to the technique in performance - something Bakhtin does not do. He limits his study to Dostoevsky himself: his critical reception; the quality of his mind; and his principles of composition. In other words, by devoting his book to Dostoevsky at the expense of the characters, Bakhtin sounds slightly monologicistic too. It remains to approach the characters themselves as Dostoevskys in their own right to find out how they are represented as author-thinkers.



Since authorship entails the novelization of a story, approaching the dramatis personae as author-thinkers will bring all questions of execution to the fore. For instance, how do the characters transform their first narratives into plots or second narratives? Do they use the medium as a transparency in which the fabula and the sjuzhet are similar, and the germ and the final product are identical? If so, their authorial paraphernalia will be overt: their rabbits will be visible up their sleeves. The other possibility is deliberate opacity: the author-thinker distances the second narrative from the first by covering up the primal story, and engaging a second narrative. This is the technique that most of James's characters favour. Julia Dallow, for instance, though deeply in love with Nick, decides to lock Cupid in, and to speak a different language - politics. Annie Miller, the crafty 'young lady', chooses to play the innocent Daisy Miller. Nick Dormer, though uninterested in what his precursors and mentors are weaving, pretends to be interested, and takes them all for a ride.

The complication of this opaque approach, however, lies in the kind of trafficking between the first narrative and the second one. This can be a total self-conscious rupture, through the adoption of a personal 'style'. But whether or not the character can sustain the game is another issue. Madame Merle, one of the craftiest Jamesian author-thinkers, fails to camouflage her reality till the end. Charlotte Stant is another example. Some characters prefer what Bakhtin calls 'stylization' to 'style' (see Chapter One). Here, while the author-thinker is behind the mask, he or she indirectly

reaches out to the addressee. Lady Agnes, in her transactions with Julia and Peter, does not expose herself, yet she leaves them in no doubt about her intentions (marrying Biddy to Peter, and Nick to Julia). Similarly, Annie Miller repeatedly encodes her interplay with all the signs of love but, as expected, Winterbourne fails to read any of them. Of course, there is the more interesting situation, in which the second narrative betrays the first, despite all kinds of fencing and mystification. The more the characters speak or act, the more they betray themselves, as happens in The Aspern Papers. It is such a mode that helps Nick see through the others' stratagems.

The concepts of 'style' and 'stylization', and the focus on language are central to The Tragic Muse. It can be said that all the characters without exception are self-conscious about them, though they approach these issues differently. Lady Agnes, Grace, Biddy, and Carteret, like the Wentworths in The Europeans, believe in 'psychological monism', the equivalence between intention and expression.<sup>17</sup> They think that language is a carrier of the speaker's intention: a metonymy, rather than a metaphor, of that speaker's character. One's expression is one's meaning, and a strong political speech is an objective correlative of great political potential. This is why, as will be seen later on, they feel certain that Nick will make a successful politician. They have heard him speak. They have got the evidence that Nick himself cannot discredit. In contradistinction to these characters, Julia, like the Baroness Eugenia Munster, believes in what David Smit calls 'dualism':



anything can be formulated in different ways. Consequently, Nick, as she sees him, is everything he claims he is not: he is both a future Prime Minister and an artist simply because he tells her that he is neither. She makes this clear to him: 'You're everything you pretend not be' (I,p.277).

'Dualism' becomes a full-blown concept in the way Peter approaches Miriam. Like his sister Julia, Peter believes that Miriam, who has at least a hundred characters, is always what she is not. Her discourse is dialogic, and her intention is, by definition, the reverse of her self-(mis)representation. This is what he argues for in an interesting dialogue with Biddy in Chapter Forty-Three. Biddy wonders why he wants to go to the theatre if Miriam has forbidden him to. He replies that Biddy does not understand Miriam's idiolect. The actress has her own 'manner of speaking'. She actually wants him to be at the theatre, and her interdiction is nothing but an invitation in disguise. 'Why then did she say that she doesn't?', Biddy asks. 'Oh because she meant just the contrary', he explains. Then Biddy passes a judgement: 'Is she false then - is she so vulgar?'. Peter does not think of it that way. His theory is that 'She speaks a special language; practically it isn't false, because it renders her thought and those who know her understand it' (II,p.295). Of course, 'dualism' here belongs to the way Peter perceives Miriam, not to Miriam herself, for her use of language is different.

Nick and Miriam are a category in themselves. They represent what Smit calls the 'aesthetic monism': language is

not a receptacle of the speaker's intentions. The speaker's 'ground' is not accessible at all. What language expresses belongs to language itself, exactly as the intentions of a literary work belong to the text itself, not to its author. It is illogical, therefore, to take the speaker seriously. In Chapter Forty-Four, Mrs. Rooth argues, in the manner of 'psychological monism', that Peter has proposed to Miriam. The latter explains that 'He has made wonderful speeches, but has never been serious'. She adds, 'He knows we haven't a square foot of common ground - that a grasshopper can't set up a house with a fish. So he has taken care to say to me only more than he can possibly mean. That makes it stand just for nothing' (II, p. 315). This approach to language, which recalls that of the artist Felix Young in The Europeans, is emphasized by Nick. When Julia tells him that language is a receptacle of truth, he replies that 'It has nothing to do with the truth or with the search for it ... It's an appeal ... to the love of names and phrases, the love of hollow idiotic words, of shutting the eyes tight and making a noise' (I, p. 103). He repeats his point to Carteret at the end of Book Third: 'I deceive people without in the least intending to'. The old man, who, like Julia, believes in the truthfulness of language, feels all at sea: 'What on earth do you mean? Are you deceiving me?' (I, p. 309). Language here becomes mere 'noise', for 'yes' and 'no' mean the same thing.

These three forms of language are crucial to the critical reception of the artist. The first two call for taking the artist seriously, which is bound to make the person of letters



a politician, a physician, a marriage-consultant or anything but an artist. The third attitude argues for the opposite: taking an artist 'seriously' can be as misguided and wrong-headed as taking a comedian at his word. An artist taken literally will be literally mistaken. This recalls The Aspern Papers. As seen in Chapter One, Tina believes that the narrator's discourse and demeanour speak for him, whereas he believes he can send flowers, and relate romantically to a marriageable female, without being a lover.

It is significant that this focus on language originates in Nick's political speeches. Most of the characters, Lady Agnes, Grace, Biddy, Julia, Carteret and Nash, refer to Nick's orations. In Chapter Six, Julia says to him, 'If you don't speak well it's your own fault; you know how to perfectly. And you usually do' (I,p.103). In Chapter Fifteen, she goes back to the same point: 'You are clever: you can never make me believe the contrary after your speech on Tuesday. Don't speak to me! I've seen, I've heard, and I know what's in you' (I,p.277). At the end of Book Third, Carteret, says to him, 'You've no excuse. Don't tell me after your speeches at Harsh!' (I,p.309). And when Nick complains to his mother about salons and people, she tells him he has to 'speak' again. The anecdote surfaces once more in Chapter Thirty-Nine. Here both Lady Agnes and Grace feel sorry for Peter because he has missed Nick's speeches (II,p.229).

Some critics, as quoted in Chapter Two, misread this as a conflict between politics and aesthetics, or art and the world:

But the focus is on language rather than politics as can be seen by putting the matter in Genettean terms. In his chapter on 'Frequency', Gérard Genette talks about the 'repeating narrative': 'narrating n times what happened once (nN/1S)'.<sup>18</sup> He comments that this kind of frequency engenders the use of 'stylistic variations' or multiple 'points of view'. These two functions undoubtedly relate to language and composition, not to topical teleology. They also put the novel in a specifically authorial perspective. Furthermore, Nick's speeches, which happen once in the story, are never quoted in the narrative, which de-politicizes the novel, and emphasizes the artistic focus of the discourse. This is indeed the function of the 'repeating narrative': foregrounding discourse, and representing characters as being self-conscious about the performance of speech.

The centrality of these issues can be demonstrated by considering Lady Agnes, one of the most dominant 'authorial' figures in the novel. Her performance in Chapter Thirty-Nine is a clear example. Her visitor, Peter Sherringham has been promoted, which makes him a tempting match for Biddy. Lady Agnes immediately extemporizes a design to throw him and Biddy together, exactly as she has tried to marry Nick to Julia. Her failure in the first case is due, among other things, to limiting herself to 'style'. Hence she draws heavily on 'stylization' here. Whatever she says reveals that she has her addressee on her mind, and that it is perlocution (the effect on that addressee) that governs her locution, rather than the other way round. The narrator describes how she avails herself



of the occasion, saying, 'her view of the possibilities of things - those possibilities from which she still might squeeze, as a parent almost in despair, the drop that would sweeten her cup' (II,pp.225-6). This description makes her sound not a parent in despair, but an author suddenly given another chance after having been struck blind.

The first step she takes is the termination of the troublesome representation of her children. Instead, she portrays them in a winsome way, specifically engineered to bait Peter. This is how she describes Biddy: 'Dear child ... her only fault is after all that she adores her brother. She has a capacity for adoration and must always take her gospel from someone' (II,p.226). This representation of Biddy is very interesting, for she is not introduced as a paragon of perfection. She is 'faulty', but her flaw, and that is the device, is her virtue. This reversal in characterization is more effective when addressed to a self-centred romanticist like Peter. He will be looking down upon Biddy because she is faulty, which gives his romantic ego the vantage point. But at the same time, he will be actually looking up to her, for she is virtuous. Furthermore, the phrase, 'capacity for adoration', promises the romantic Peter an inexhaustible love that is consecrated into a kind of worship by the term 'gospel'. This makes Biddy the Juliet Peter is after, that is, the Juliet who will drink her fill of poison if he goes away; not the one, in Chapter Fifty-One, who will dash for Dashwood the moment Peter is out of the narrative. This Biddy will definitely save him the disappointments that Miriam has in store for him, as Julia

has already prophesied. In short, Lady Agnes is speaking as Peter himself would do if he were in her place, which perfectly exemplifies the dialogism of 'stylization'.

Her performance will be appreciated more when contrasted with Grace's. The latter is pure 'style', in the sense of being unself-conscious, and unaccommodating of the context. The first time Grace articulates herself occurs after Lady Agnes describes Nick as the young man with 'the highest ability' and 'the highest ambition'. Grace comments that Nick's paintings are a 'horrid lot of things'. The stylizing mother stops her short: 'You know nothing about the matter'. Then she adds, as the narrator reports, that 'her children did have a good deal of artistic taste: Grace was the only one who was totally deficient in it' (II,p.230). Grace, as if to substantiate her mother's point, 'blows another gaffe', saying they have nobody to depend on after Nick has disappointed Carteret. Lady Agnes, confirming the difference between style and stylization, asks Grace to reflect on her medium: 'Don't be vulgar, for God's sake' (II,p.231). (Style is vulgar, but stylization is art.)

Lady Agnes's discourse becomes full-blown stylization the moment Peter mentions his recent promotion. This time, she makes him the topic of her talk, the centre of the universe, and she does verbally to him what Nick does with brush and palette. The narrator says, 'She took an extravagant interest in his future proceedings, the probable succession of events in his career, [and] the different honours he would be likely to come in for ...' (II,p.234). The perlocution, as the narrator



describes it, is a sort of 'contagion'. It makes Peter 'appeal sensibly to himself', recall every detail that beautifies Biddy, and put all analeptic anecdotes in the perspective of the would-be-wife. In other words, the outcome of Lady Agnes's talking like Peter, or implanting suggestions in him, is that he himself starts to talk like Lady Agnes. No wonder a few chapters later, he marries Biddy.<sup>19</sup>

But is not the representation of Lady Agnes, the critics' 'minor figure', as an author-thinker a misreading of the novel? Indeed, it is not, for the text itself dictates this reading. She is always portrayed as a self-conscious, scrutinizing, calculating character. And her authorial mode is scenically projected at the restaurant in chapter Three. Here, the waiter suggests a number of dishes, a variety of possibilities; but she rejoins, 'you'll give us what I tell you' (my emphasis). Then she 'mentioned with distinctness and authority the dishes of which she desired that the meal should be composed'. The waiter, instead of giving in, retaliates with more alternatives, 'but as they produced absolutely no impression on her he became silent and submissive, doing justice apparently to her ideas' (I, p. 38). It is true that this anecdote is an ironization of Lady Agnes, for rattling swords with the waiter is subversive of the authority-display. But this does not override the effect of the scene: Lady Agnes's monologism and authoritative approach, which are encoded in the last clause, 'doing justice to her ideas'.

One of these ideas is analogous to the scene itself: the family power-structure, or Lady Agnes's narrative mode. Will she delegate, polyphonize and endow the family with the symmetry of equality? Will she leave her sons and daughters in charge of their own narratives? Or will she domineer over them, and drown their characters, as if they were waiters; and she, a restaurateur? As it happens, the latter is the case, for she wants to buy them the food of her own choice, to marry them her own way, and to allocate them the professions she decides on, which recalls 'Covering End'. Here, Prodmore monologizes his daughter, Cora, until the American Mrs. Gracedew frees her, telling the father to polyphonize and never to 'overdo the nursing' (CT,X,p.329).

It is against this background that Lady Agnes embarks on her narrative, the objective of which is marrying Nick to Julia. If this works, she will go back to glory, for Julia is a goldmine. The surplus of the enterprise is Nick's becoming a Member of Parliament, which will automatically make her his Egeria. (This recalls Mrs. Staines and her son, Harold, in 'The Sweetheart of M. Briseux', and Mrs. Temperly in the tale named after her.) Lady Agnes, like these two mothers, wants everything and has everything calculated, but the design is too complicated to be easily workable. She should represent Nick in a way that makes him marketable for Julia. She must also portray Mrs. Dallow in a manner that makes her marriageable for Nick. To do that, she must find out what Julia's forbidden fruit is, and what Nick's priorities are. After that, she can represent each one as the objective correlative of the other's



desire. The task, which recalls the complexity of Mallet's double narrative, requires what Gaston Probert calls 'a delirium of delicacy', and maximal stylization, for she must be able to see things with the eyes of Nick and Julia, not with her own (The Reverberator, p.115). Will she be able to actualize these possibilities without laying bare her own devices? The narrator repeatedly points out that she is willing to efface herself if that would help the success of her plot:

Lady Agnes did justice to the natural rule in virtue of which it usually comes to pass that a woman doesn't get on with her husband's female belongings, and was even willing to be sacrificed to it in her disciplined degree. But she desired not to be sacrificed for nothing: if she was to be objected to as a mother-in-law she wished to be the mother-in-law first (I, pp.57-6).

This passage signifies a lot of craft. Lady Agnes, while pretending to acknowledge the natural rule, injects her sentiment with a condemnation of Julia. Julia is represented as the stranger and the trouble-maker. This subtlety informs Lady Agnes's performance: she will convey to Julia only what appeals to the latter. For Mrs. Dalloway 'mustn't know' anything subversive. Hence Lady Agnes will compile 'the least injurious account' of Nick. More accurately, as the narrator says, she likes to represent him to Julia 'as tremendously occupied ... in getting off political letters ... and particularly in drawing up his address to the electors of Harsh' (I, p.72). But to see her design through, she must see through Julia, which entails the necessity of what the narrator calls a 'plenty of inward occupation'.

This is actually what happens after one of Julia's theatrical moves. The Dormers call on her at the Rue de la Paix, but Mrs. Dallow has unexpectedly absented herself - something she will do again in the lake-Chapter. Lady Agnes, as an author-thinker, does not let the incident pass unnoticed. She commits it to the cauldron of scrutiny, turns it upside down and inside out, and tries to exhaust it with a delirious decoding on the assumption that whatever Julia says or does is a self-conscious sign encoded with a message to the Dormers. Lady Agnes is not only authorial, but she believes that the other characters are designing author-thinkers too, which is typically Jamesian. The narrator, after registering Lady Agnes's anxiety, allocates a considerable 'duration' to the critical activity engendered by the anecdote:

she had taken [it] for granted Julia would be in a manner waiting for them. How could she be sure Nick wasn't coming? ... Was she then not much in earnest about Nick's standing? Didn't she recognise the importance of being there to see him about it? Lady Agnes wondered if her behaviour were a sign of her being already tired of the way this young gentleman treated her. Perhaps she had gone out because an instinct told her that the great propriety of their meeting early would make no difference with him - told her he wouldn't after all come. His mother's heart sank as she glanced at this possibility that their precious friend was already tired, she having on her side an intuition that there were still harder things in store (I, p.74; my emphasis).

The anxiety that Julia may be worried about Nick's not 'standing', 'coming', or applying himself seriously to the election will be addressed in terms of stylization. In Chapter Six, in which Julia makes her debut, Lady Agnes brings the



election into play with subtlety: 'Dear Julia ... It's so interesting about Harsh ... We're immensely excited'. Nick is excited too: 'To be sure he knows it. He's immensely grateful'. But the moment she drops delicacy, talking about 'my son's standing', Julia, a craftier author-thinker, aborts the mother's progress. She replies that the people and the party manager will 'have the person I want them to have' (I, pp. 96, 97). Lady Agnes does not argue back, for she has 'schooled herself for years, in commerce with her husband and her sons not to insist unduly' (I,p.72). This is why her only reply to the slap on her face is to 'breathe' to Nick on his way out with Julia: 'Do be nice to her' (I,p.99).

I. 'Ah dear mother, don't  
do the British matron.'

The way Lady Agnes relates herself to Julia, as seen above, throws Nick and Mrs. Dallow together, which points to the possible realization of the overall design. But the problem is that she does not use the same delicacy and stylization in her transaction with Nick. She employs different paraphernalia which, as it happens, prove unworkable. With Julia she prioritizes perlocution, submits herself to the other, and tries to establish in advance what kind of woman Julia is, and what kind of language that woman speaks. Such an approach to Nick may distance him from the family like his brother, Percival; may give him the impression that he is no longer a son; and may give him the opportunity to relate to his mother in the same way as Julia relates to her. In short,

Nick, as a man, can be ominous to Lady Agnes's designs. This is why she denies him all the methodology she uses for Mrs. Dalloway, and approaches him as a son. She, the mother, will play the matron, which makes her actuality and reality, the person and the actress, mystify each other. This may not be as workable as it seems, for the mother may be too natural to be artistic; or the matron, too artistic to be natural. James knows that a beautiful voice can impede beautiful singing. The mother may be the only person who cannot do the mother.

However, Lady Agnes engages all the devices that may speak to the son, engineer the make-believe, and represent her as a verisimilar mother. Clearly, nothing can be more mimetic in this case than sentimentalism. She unleashes all motherly emotions on him, exactly as she releases his father's ghost upon him. The best demonstration of this is Chapter Thirteen, which is totally dominated by Lady Agnes. The place is Harsh; the time is the Polling day; the occasion is Nick's success; and Lady Agnes's objective is to cash in on these circumstances by making Nick propose to Julia. First, she underlines the point that he owes his success to his father. Then, noticing the influence of her device, she capitalizes on it, saying, 'he hears you, he watches you, he rejoices in you' (I, p. 241). He will rejoice more if Nick marries Julia 'now'. Her insistence on the timing confirms that she is self-conscious about all the co-ordinates of the situation. Furthermore, to make Nick see things her way, she puts Julia's performance in her own perspective. She tells him that Julia is not really interested in politics. She has staged the elections as a sign of her



devotion to him. But what happens is that the moment she takes off the sentimental gloves, he sloughs off the son in himself, and plays the independent individual. Observing his reaction, she instantly returns to her sentimental devices: 'Your father would have valued it for you beyond everything ... He's with you always; he takes with you, at your side, every step you take yourself' (I,p.250).

A stronger injection is the one referring to herself and the two daughters: 'we're three dismal women in a filthy house; and what are three dismal women, more or less, in London?' (p.251). The narrator describes her technique, saying, 'she appealed to him in a gentler and more anxious key, which had this virtue to touch him' (P.250). She distinguishes between one key and another, and knows which device touches and which does not. The influence, as the narrator reports it, is thrilling: 'what was filial in him, all the piety he owed, especially to the revived spirit of his father ... became the very handle to the door of the chamber of concessions' (I,p.251). The narrator seems to believe that sentimentalism has scored a point, for Nick says to his mother, 'I 'll do what I can do for you - everything, everything I can' (I,p.253).

But has Lady Agnes really wrapped up Nick in her sentimentalism? Is it not the case that both the narrator and the mother, like Julia, Nash, Carteret, and, in some sense, James himself, are wrapped up by Nick's devices? What I want to argue is that Nick, contrary to James's Preface and the critics' judgements, is the strength of the novel, and the

craftiest character in it. Most critics, in the manner of the characters, take Nick seriously, and consequently play into his hands. Daniel Schneider, for instance, claims that Nick Dormer is really a man helplessly torn between the political life and the artistic life ... his inability to choose between art and politics, is apparently meant to be contrasted with the relative constancy of Peter Sherringham and Miriam Rooth to their vocations'.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, William Goetz quotes Nick uncritically: 'The final difficulty with politics is that even while Nick tries to represent the position of Harsh, he misrepresents himself'.<sup>21</sup> The same misreading is articulated by Ernest Lockridge, who argues that Nick's problematic is the discrepancy between art and politics.<sup>22</sup> No wonder W.W. Robson blames the 'failure' of the novel squarely on Nick: 'The weakness of The Tragic Muse ... is in Nick Dormer ... The treatment of Nick brings our dissatisfaction to a head'.<sup>23</sup>

Nick's critical reception, as with the art-world issue discussed in Chapter Two, is engendered by the Preface to the novel. Here, James dismisses him as a myopic character, saying, 'Nick can't on the whole see - for I have represented him as in his day quite sufficiently troubled and anxious' (AN,p.92). Later on, he passes his Rhadamanthine judgement: 'It strikes me, alas, that he is not quite so interesting as he was fondly intended to be ... Any representation of the artist in triumph must be flat ...' (AN,p.96). He adds that the importance in this context arises from what the artist produces, which seems to suggest that Nick's paintings are central to the novel. Marianna Torgovnick, the author of The



Visual Arts, Pictorialism and the Novel: James, Lawrence and Woolf, plausibly observes that, 'very little of Nick's work lives for the reader, and astonishingly little of this novel is pictorial. Its uses of the visual arts finally emerge once again as decorative'.<sup>24</sup> Like Torgovnick, Kenneth Graham is doubtful about James's attitude toward Nick. He says,

It is strange that James should have worried in the Preface ... about the degree of our identification with Nick, and strange that so many subsequent critics have accepted that his point that since the artist "in triumph" is necessarily impossible to portray, Nick therefore is too 'simple and flat' as a character. Nick is precisely what James apparently goes on to criticize him for not being: a "hero" who evokes our admiration and compassion because he is also a "comparatively floundering person."<sup>25</sup>

In principle, Graham's critique is to the point, but his substantiation is anticlimactic. For James, Nick is not interesting because he is 'floundering'. For Graham, Nick is interesting because he is 'floundering'. For me, he is a very important author-thinker because he manages to transform his 'floundering' into a forte, and to turn his schism into a stratagem, exactly as the crafty may convert a dangerous ditch into a protecting moat.

This reading is signified by the epithets Nick uses to describe his ambivalence. As quoted earlier, he wonders why the gods do something 'so inconsequent, so improbable, so preposterous? It's the vulgarest practical joke' (I, p.181). This discourse is dialogic for, while registering Nick's limitation, it also signifies his determination. All the

epithets suggest that he is not going to (let himself) be a by-product of that fabula. On the contrary, as the last phrase, 'practical joke', signifies, he may self-consciously simulate that schism to make sport of everybody else, especially that he has got the mechanism to do it: language. He is aware, as already underlined, that language is dialogic. Although it is simply an art of making noise, it can be manipulated as a mocking medium.

For instance, in Chapter Forty-Eight, he reveals, in a revisionist analepsis, that he has been capable of pretending 'to take up causes which he really left lying' (II,p.368; notice the ambiguity of the word 'lying'). He also confesses, as the narrator reports, that he has rejoiced in doing it: 'He had assumed a virtue and enjoyed assuming it'. The point is that he has simulated this duplicity on purpose so that a swerving from all monologistic agents will be accomplished; and a final reversal of positions will be achieved. His 'assumption had cheated his father and his mother and his affianced wife and his rich benefactor and the candid burgesses of Harsh and the cynical reporters of newspapers' (II,p.368). The list should include Nash too. With such an authorial performance to his credit, it is definitely an act of 'floundering' to claim that Nick is the weakness of the novel, as if he were a replica of Roderick Hudson.

With the strings in his hands, Nick pretends to be everybody's puppet. His mother wants a son; he plays the son. Julia needs a lover; he offers her a Cupid. Carteret needs an



heir; Nick makes believe that he will be the Carteret, Junior. Nash prefers him to be his ephebe; he acts out the ephebe. Of course, such a manipulation gives them the impression that they are in charge, exactly as Tina makes the narrator believe that he is managing her. More than that, to tighten the bondage on their eyes, Nick makes them do for him everything he himself wants to do. The result is that while they think that he is their agent, they are actually the personae of his pantomime, which makes him a Ralph Touchett minus the illness and the passive voyeurism, but plus all the sophistication and the artistic manipulation. For instance, instead of postponing the marriage to Julia, he manipulates the relationship in a way that makes her take that decision. The irony is that the more she insists, the more he pretends to be the victim. Similarly, in his meeting with Carteret, he does not criticize Mrs. Dallow. Instead, he masterminds the dialogue in a manner that makes the old man condemn her. And when he feels that it is high time for sublimating himself and turning his back on Nash, he does not throw Nash out. He handles him in a mode that makes the precursor take action and bolt out of the novel.

It has been demonstrated above, for instance, how Lady Agnes tries to domineer over Nick. The narrator appears to believe that she has got to the chamber of her son's concessions. But whether or not he is in the chamber is something else. As the novel unfolds, it becomes clear that there is nobody inside, which confirms what Gordon and Stokes say about the transaction between Nick and his mother: 'Lady Agnes does not understand Nick, although he understands her'.<sup>26</sup>

By understanding her, I mean that he knows, as he tells her in Chapter One, that she is acting, that all her performance is fiction, and that it is 'inconsequent', 'improbable' and 'preposterous'. When she tries to moralize, and to preach against the horror of art, he says to her, 'Ah dear mother, don't do the British matron' (I,p.12). It is all 'doing', not 'being'. He underlines his seeing through his mother again in Chapter Six, when he tells Julia, 'My mother's even more political than you' (I,p.105). Indeed, whenever he mentions his mother, he confirms that he sees the rabbit up her sleeve. In Chapter Nine, he tells Nash, 'my apostasy ... would really kill my mother. She thinks my father's watching me from the skies' (I,p.182). Nick's use of the 'skies', instead of the 'heaven', bespeaks irony, and confirms his understanding of his mother.

The inference is that he is always in the light, and she is always in the dark. No wonder the narrator describes her, on the day of Nick's regaining his seat, saying, 'her tall upright black figure seemed in possession of the fair vastness [of the drawing-room] in the manner of an exclamation-point at the bottom of a blank page' (I,p.238). The image is central, for it states Lady Agnes's position at what is supposed to be her supreme triumph. But it is actually a failure in disguise. The possession of a blank page, which symbolizes Nick's enigmatic performance, is a trope of bankruptcy. Furthermore, both her tall figure and the exclamation-point recall almost literally how she looks like when she realizes her total defeat in



Chapter Forty-Seven: 'Lady Agnes walked straight and stiff, never turning her head ... It was in this manner she wished to signify that she had accepted her wrongs' (II, p.370).

Indeed, her failure is expected, for Nick never takes her seriously. His continual kisses, a device to stop her, signify that the metalepsis is already under way. In the manner of a belated parent, he approaches her as if she were the early acolyte. The narrator, describing the trope of kissing, says that Nick 'drew her closer, kissed her again, held her as he would have held a child in a paroxysm, soothing her silently till it could abate' (I, p.247). This reversal of roles confirms what has been suggested at the end of Chapter Two. Nick relates to his mother in the same way Miriam Rooth relates to hers. In both cases, the pattern is Bloomian: old children versus young parents, or early ephebes and belated precursors. The conjunction is expressed by Miriam. While sitting to Nick, she says, 'I wish you could put mother in it [the painting] too; make us live there side by side and tell our little story. "The wonderful actress and her still more wonderful mamma - don't you think that's an awfully good subject?"' (I, p.316). As will be seen later, it is a wonderful subject.

## II. Much Ado about Not(h)ing

### Julia: Love Not Politics

Nick's asking his mother not to do 'the British matron' recalls his response to Julia: 'Oh what a tangled web we weave' (I, p.267).<sup>27</sup> This significantly occurs in the most

important chapter as far as Nick and Julia are concerned. Ironically, Chapter Fifteen is sidestepped by most critics. However, web-weaving, which suggests story-spinning narrative-making, and deception, puts the performances of the two characters into the polyphonic perspective, and confirms that Julia, like the others, is an author-thinker. It also underlines the fact that Nick sees through her, and knows that, like his mother, she is engaging a second narrative. His access to her first one is facilitated by the setting of the meeting: a lake symbolically fed by a 'natural spring'.

What happens here puts paid to the critical reception of Mrs. Dalloway. As quoted in Chapter Two, most critics pigeonhole her as a 'goddess of politics'. Dorothea Krook comes closer to the first narrative, but she relegates it to the second. She says, 'we are left in no doubt that she is in love with him -that her attachment to Nick is passionate and not merely calculating. But ... she sees in him the opportunity of fulfilling her own dearest ambition, that of using her money, her intelligence and her beauty in the service of the English political ideal'.<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Graham, who is closer to the point than Krook, sees a conjunction between Julia's politics and her passion for Nick: 'When she wishes he would "change" and throw himself into his political career with determination, she is also expressing in that wish her desire simply that he would love her more directly and strongly'.<sup>29</sup>

Although both Krook and Graham mention love, they keep it within the orbit of politics, which feeds back into the



stalemate of the salon-studio conflict, and confirms once more how critics have missed the polyphonic novelization within the novel. Julia's first narrative is LOVE, which is, as John Bayley argues, intrinsically polyphonic.<sup>30</sup> She adores Nick, but she cannot put it to him in this straightforward manner. Her problem is stylistic and compositional: how can she express herself? What kind of design is best for the delivery of the crippled Cupid? The complication is that she is, as already mentioned, governed by her pride. Transparency is a humbling of the self. This is why she embarks on a kind of stylization that verges on style in its opacity and closure. Put differently, the Bakhtinian 'assimilation' of love in her discourse sounds like 'non-assimilation' or non-love. And it is not surprising that the troping she resorts to is political, for there is a sort of generic consonance between pride and politics, as the whips, the ponies and the chariots demonstrate on the Polling-day. The result, however, is that her real story remains reticent until Book Third.

Here, Chapter Fifteen is devoted to the longest meeting between Nick and Julia. They row across the lake to the temple of Vesta, against a backcloth of pastoral landscape - like that in The Europeans - and amidst a context in which res and verba intermingle and resurrect the first narrative. The discourse, which recalls James's ability to produce what he calls the 'special effect', as in 'The Great Good Place', leaves the reader in no doubt about the 'much-ado-about-not(h)ing' transaction between the Beatrice-like Julia and the Benedick-like Nick. The lake, which does the office 'of an

open eye in a dull face', and the 'circular' temple, which is surrounded by 'white columns', and is 'raised' on the 'bosom' of that lake, say it all (I,p.269). The place symbolizes 'Rome', but George has taken it as a symbol of other things. He has never taken Julia there. Nick, by contrast, will ferry her straight to the fane of the forbidden fruit. On the way to the temple, he 'bent over the oars and sent the boat forward, keeping this up for a succession of minutes' (I,p.270). But on the way back, after doing all the temple-work, the 'boat' seems more relaxed: Nick 'dipped the oars very slowly indeed ... they floated vaguely, they mainly sat and glowed at each other as if everything had been settled' (I,p.276).

What has been settled is that their readings of each other have been nothing but misreadings arising from the stylization of their second narratives. Nick notices that her tone is crippled by her inner-conflict: she has a 'sign of that odd shyness - a perverse stiffness at a moment when she probably but wanted to be soft' (I,p.265). Softness is a sign of the first narrative - and a sign is an 'eye in the dull face' of the second narrative. Nick observes another: he feels that she does not care for Hoppus 'in spite of her having encumbered herself with the stiff fresh [political] magazine' (I,p.267). His observation is substantiated by the fact that she forgets the periodical at the temple. But her pride takes time to give way. First comes the 'much-ado-about-nothing' of the defence mechanism of 'reaction-formation': 'The things I say are the right things', and 'Don't you know I can do everything?' (I,pp.267,268). Then, the landscape, and the



interplay between setting and psyche, undo the make-believe and introduce the first narrative as it really is. She tells him she is ready to cancel all dinners, to give up all salons for his own sake, and to renounce all candidates. She adds that she has proposed to him 'Everyday of my life', but that is not otherwise registered in the novel. The explanation follows: 'As I say, it's hard - for a proud woman' (I,p.275).

At the heart of it is the quest for composition and style, as the ending of Chapter Fifteen confirms. Here, Nick wonders if he can report to his mother that he and Julia will get married. She replies, 'You may tell her she shall have Broadwood' (I,p.284). With the lake behind them now, her reply represents the return to 'dualism'. Everything can be formulated in different ways. The Julia of the first narrative expresses 'I love you' in these ways: 'How little you know me'; 'I'm not working for anything that you'll ever guess'; 'You're not a man -- you're a child!'; 'What do I care for candidates'; 'however much you might have liked me you'd never have done so half as much as I've cared for you' and 'I wish I didn't adore you' (Chapter Fifteen). The proud Julia of the second narrative formulates the same sentiment in these opaque stratagems: the theatrical absentation of herself from the Hotel de la Paix, buying presents for Grace and Biddy, giving Broadwood to Lady Agnes, sending Nick the best paintings in George's collection, and staging the election. The readability of the mode of transparency in the first case leaves Nick in no doubt about Julia's love, which makes him propose to her. But the opacity

of the second makes him misread her. His judgement of her sending George's paintings to him, for instance, is that it is an abuse of art.

Moreover, the second narrative has antagonized Nick because it has represented Julia as a monologicistic mentor, a sort of a female Gilbert Osmond, who envies nobody but the 'Emperor of Russia', the 'Sultan of Turkey', and the 'Pope of Rome' (The Portrait of a Lady, I,p.382). By contrast, the primary narrative has portrayed her as a polyphonic lover. She tells him that she will not undermine his freedom. She does not want to drown his character. On the contrary, she believes that his life is his, not hers. He is free to choose the salon, the studio, or anything else. Her revelations are endorsed by the rest of the novel. His becoming a Member of Parliament does not lead to marriage. But once she is certain of his not being in love with Miriam Rooth, she sloughs off the second narrative. In fact, the last sentence in the novel is a judgement to this effect by the authority on politics, Macgeorge. He 'has even ceased at all fondly to believe in her', which means that he has realized that her politics has been nothing but a manner of speaking, and a stylistic medium. It is a web that will express her love to Nick, if not with style, at least with pride (II,p.442). This suggests that she and Nick may get married, but it will be a polyphonic wedlock. Marcia Jacobson says, 'a new union must be different from the old: because Nick has asserted his independence, a more equal relationship must result from reunion'.<sup>31</sup>



### III. Agon or 'A la guerre'

#### comme 'à la guerre'

Just as precursors are father-figures, and acolytes are metaphorical children, so parents and children are predecessors and ephebes. What happens between Nick and Lady Agnes, Miriam and Mrs. Rooth is a form of the anxiety of influence. Put differently, the narratives involving Nick and Nash, Miriam and Madame Carre are tropings on the other 'cases'. The inter-connections are central: Nick relates to Nash in the same way Miriam relates to her mother - the conflict is over and what remains of it in the text is nothing but the resurrection of the dead. The 'young' Mrs. Rooth and the 'belated' Nash are metaleptically chaperoned by the 'old' Miriam and the precursor-like Nick. By contrast, Miriam's transaction with the French actress recalls Nick's conflict with his mother. Miss Rooth is an apprentice and Nick is a son. The French actress is the preceptress, exactly as Lady Agnes is the matriarch. The correspondence is called for by the fact that the 'real' parent, Lady Agnes, is artistic, for she engages the art of authorship, as seen above. Madame Carre touches on the parental when her criticism turns into cynicism, and her instruction slides into patronization. Like a matron, not an artist, she advises Miriam to get married and to forget about the theatre. She actually finds her a match, Peter Sherringham: 'Marry her, my son, and give her diamonds. Make her an ambassadress; she'll look very well' (I, p.134).

Of course, the polyphonic representation of the characters is the narrative set-up for the ephebe-precursor wrestling. The young artists are author-thinkers engaging their predecessors, and that is not the only manifestation. The novel is strewn with the repertoire of the anxiety of influence. In Chapter Two, for instance, while touring the exhibition at the Palais de l'Industrie with Biddy, Nick focuses on two busts out of all the exhibits, which endows them with a special significance. The first work, which makes Nick play 'in the air with his hand ... represented an ugly old man with a bald head'. The second sculpture, described by Nick as 'a good case', represents 'a head of a young man in terra-cotta ... a modern young man to whom, with his thick neck, his little cap and his wide ring of dense curls, the artist had given the air of some sturdy Florentine of the time of Lorenzo' (I, pp. 17, 18). The first, weakened by old age and long vowels (old man), signifies a precursor humanized by a certain ephebe. The latter, whose 'sturdiness' is emphasized not only by youth and terra cotta but by the short vowels in 'with', 'his', 'thick', 'neck', 'little', 'ring', and 'dense', is that ephebe. His 'modernity' is the medium of metalepsis: the sign of his swerving from, and defining himself against, the precursor. Moreover, the defeat of temporality and the ephebe's becoming the precursor are signified by the phrase 'the time of Lorenzo'. For this places the young man historically before the old one.

The juxtaposition of the two is a sign of the anxiety of influence. If the old man of the bust is animated in the form of Carteret, and the terra-cotta ephebe is taken for Nick, the



epiphany the latter has at Beauclere will confirm the centrality of influence. Here, after meeting the father-figure, Nick walks to the Abbey, where he 'heard nothing but the cries of several children, which sounded sweet, who were playing on the flatness of the very old tombs' (I,p.289). Their playing, like Nick's by the bust, illustrates the conflict, and demonstrates its salutary nature in James.

It is as salutary as the anxiety of influence between Madame Carré and her own precursor has been. This comes to the fore in Chapter Seven, in which Nick, Nash, Peter, Miriam and Mrs. Rooth call on the French actress. What happens recalls the anecdote of the busts, for despite the fact that Madame Carré's life, like her house, is a sort of museum or exhibition, Peter narrates an anecdote that feeds straight into the anxiety of influence. 'She[Madame Carré] had often described to him her rare predecessor, straight from whose hands she had received her most celebrated parts and of whom her own manner was often a religious imitation' (I,p.114). This anecdote, bearing in mind that the young actress is present, puts the novel in the perspective of the ephebe-precursor wrestling. The annotation to the story implies that great art and Madame Carré are one. Her death will be Rhadamanthine for the theatre, which immediately brings Miriam to the spotlight. Will art perish? Will she do to it what the would-be predecessor has done to her own forebear? The latter explains that transumption, if it takes place, is not going to be an arbitrary process, for there is a logic to it. Miriam has to abide by the same system she herself has conformed to. Madame Carré tells Peter, 'Well

if she will have it she shall; she shall know what she isn't in for, what I went through, battered and broken in as we all have been - all who are worthy, who have had the honour' (1,p.198).

Going through, and 'breaking in', suggest a succession of stages, which is, interestingly enough, brought into play by the novel in the form of the concept of 'phases'. Gordon and Stokes underline the importance of this formula, saying that 'phase is an extension of moment or moments. Repetition or recurrence is fatal: happy moments, or a phase, had their value, but cannot retain it. We must move on: the moments must be multiplied'.<sup>32</sup> They quote Nash's statement that he has passed through two stages: the first is buying pots from Mrs. Rooth; the second is smashing them. They label these two stages as two moments. Their interpretation echoes one of Peter's comments on Miriam's swift progress. He thinks that 'her existence - was a series of parts assumed for the moment, each changed for the next, before the perpetual mirror of some curiosity or admiration or wonder ...' (I, pp.188-9). Describing 'phase' as an 'extension of moment' is important, for 'extension' draws attention to the other signification: phase as a (Bloomian) ratio, or a stage in the anxiety of influence, and the acolyte's development.

Indeed, Peter's use of 'moment' above, has something to do with his own romantic relationship with time, not with succession versus repetition. He wants to advance the cause of the poor Miriam, so he decides to make the French actress give the helpless ephebe some private tuition. To his dismay, he



finds Miriam already there imposing herself on Madame Carré, which recalls what happens to Mallet when he decides to ask Christina to sit to Hudson. He finds Hudson already there sculpting Christina. The point is that Miriam's being ahead in time mirrors, and ironizes, Peter's being behind time. The contrast intensifies his reaction, which makes him think in 'moments' rather than in a medium of a longer duration, such as stages. (Peter is always at loggerheads with time: either too late or too early, but never on time. Hence his affair with Miriam sounds like the story of Roger Hubert and Isabel Morton in Watch and Ward: 'He had made a woman a goddess, and she had made him a fool'.)<sup>33</sup>

However, when not in the grip of a romantic 'moment', Peter's use of 'phase' connotes 'ratio', as in this example. Observing that Miriam's anxiety-stage is being replaced with that of 'elation', he wonders, 'Was this succession of phases a sign she was really a case of the celebrated artistic temperament, the nature that made people provoking and interesting?' (1, p. 161). The fact that what Peter is talking about can be replaced with the stages of the artist's development confirms that the Jamesian 'phase' is a proto-type of the Bloomian 'ratio'. Hence the focus should be on the stages of the artist's development, as manifested in the thematization of the anxiety of influence.

To recapitulate, the anxiety of influence is not enforced on The Tragic Muse, for it is embedded in the texture and the

structure of the novel, as all the signs confirm: the Preface to the novel, the wrestling between James and Shakespeare (see Chapter Two), the conflicts between the ephebes and their parents or parent-figures (Nick and his mother, Nick and his father, Nick and the old Carteret, Nick and Nash, Miriam and her mother, Miriam and Madame Carré); the polyphony of the novel, the anecdote of the busts, the children dancing on the tombs of the forebears, the story of Madame Carré and her precursor, and the concept of phases. Any of the above narratives can be a case study of the anxiety of influence.

For instance, it is possible to talk about the anxiety between Miriam and her mother. Their debut makes clear that the anxiety between daughter and mother is over, and that what looks like the days of 'flooded apprenticeship' is nothing but a resurrection of the defeated parent. These two functions generate the possibility of a replay or a reconstruction of the whole conflict. The mother, as a sort of preceptress, teaches her pupil languages, and gives her the necessary cosmopolitan education. The disciple, however, disillusioned about her precursor's literary escapism, swerves from her elder (clinamen). Miriam decides to go for the book of life instead of the life of books. She tells Peter that the mother's approach is 'very well for her [Mrs. Rooth], but it doesn't do for me. I don't like a diet of dirty old novels' (I, p. 200). This disjunction, which recalls Catherine Sloper's criticism of her aunt, Mrs. Lavinia Penniman, will protect Miriam from becoming another Isabel Archer.



The divergence is highlighted by Peter in one of his reflections on the dialogism of the mother-daughter relationship. He feels that Mrs. Rooth 'made even the true seem fictive, while Miriam's effort was to make the fictive true' (I,p.220). The mere correction slides into antithetical position (tessera) the moment Miriam makes her divergence from her mother's bookishness complete. Her going for the theatre is an antithetical disjunction that defines her against the mother. But this act of crossing, as in most cases of the anxiety of influence, is checked by a moment of humbling the self (kenosis). As a matter of fact, this third ratio is a massive chapter in the history of Miriam and her mother. Miriam keeps 'emptying herself out', and repeatedly represents her mother as the paragon of sagacity. She reiterates that Mrs. Rooth has taught her everything, which makes the latter a 'perfect saint'.

Miriam humbles herself only to eviscerate the other. The way she humanizes her mother obliterates any sign, or cause, of anxiety. In the beginning, Mrs. Rooth is represented as knowing what she is doing. But now Miriam portrays her as a by-product of the books she reads. This Quixotic contagion is the reason why the mother confuses things and muddles priorities, which recalls how Nick sees through his mother and realizes her manipulative fiction. Miriam tells Nick, 'Mamma's bewildered -there are so many paths she wants to follow, there are so many bundles of hay' (II,p.319). This stance justifies the 'repression' of the mother and the 'daemonization' of the daughter, who is often referred to as a 'demon'.

From now on, Miriam will be her own person, and her own parent. She disengages herself from Mrs. Rooth, and sublimates herself into an independent person (askesis). In contrast to the beginning, when she has always been seen with her mother, she will always be on her own. For the first time, Mrs. Rooth stays indoors, and the daughter goes out unchaperoned. This is the threshold for the last ratio (apophrades) in which the whole scene is reversed. The daughter is now the authority and the celebrity. She starts to introduce her parent to different places, such as Nick's studio and the theatre, which recalls Rose Tramore and her mother in 'The Chaperon'. The earlier is now the latecomer, and the belated child is the parent. Temporality, as Bloom says, is overcome.<sup>34</sup>

Since the essentially same analysis applies to Nick and Gabriel Nash, I am going to address the conflict between Miriam and Madame Carré. Their narrative is a proleptic unfolding of the anxiety of influence, not an analeptic replay of something that has happened. The interesting point of departure is that it is Miriam who seeks the great actress, not the other way round, which recalls the same pattern that structures 'The Author of Beltraffio', and 'The Lesson of the Master', as will be seen in the next chapter. Such a beginning signifies what Bloom calls 'election', or the phase of being under the spell of the 'older artist's power'. Nash reveals that it is Miriam, who 'want[s] an opinion, and dear old Carré has consented to see [her]' (I, p. 58). Miriam's desire is a quest for a precursor: one cannot become an authority without going through a celebrity.



James underlines the necessity of fathering oneself on a predecessor, saying, 'One must always, I consider, think as a sort of point de repère, of some one good person. Only it's best if it's a person one's afraid of ... what one really requires is a kind of salutary terror ... "Our antagonist is our helper -; he prevents our being superficial"' (The Awkward Age, p.316). Like James, Bloom emphasizes this tenet of anxiety by seconding Nietzsche's aphorism: 'When one hasn't had a good father it is necessary to invent one'.<sup>35</sup>

James's juxtaposition of the ephebe and the master is nothing but a polarization, as the word 'antagonist' suggests. Moreover, the synthesis of 'helper' and 'antagonist' engenders the dialogism of the 'salutary terror', which confirms once more, as in the epiphany of the dancing children, that the trajectory of the anxiety in James is anti-predecessor but pro-ephebe. When applied to The Tragic Muse, this view will forecast the demise of the 'Balzac of actresses' and the daemonization of the 'jeune Anglaise'. This anticipation is highlighted by Peter Sherringham. Commenting on the polarization of the two actresses and the prolepsis of their conflict, he says something that recalls Paul Overt and St. George: 'It was doubtless that the girl's [face] was fresh and strong and had a future in it, while poor Madame Carré's was worn and weary and had only a past' (I, p.190).

The acolyte, Miriam Rooth, meets the great actress in Chapter Seven for the first time. The way this meeting takes place perfectly exemplifies the first stage of the anxiety of

influence (clinamen). The images of 'presence' and 'absence' are brought to the fore as the only vehicles of the moment. Miriam is present in the room; but the French celebrity is absent. This enunciation is so systematic in James that it sounds like a pattern. The point is that it surfaces again in the fin de siècle tales, such as 'The Lesson of the Master', and 'The Author of Beltraffio'. Paul Overt of the first tale and the narrator of the second one call on their Masters but the latter happen to be off the scene. In The Tragic Muse, the 'absence' of the precursor is immediately projected ironically and pejoratively onto her museum. The narrator sees nothing in the place but absence, hears nothing but silence, and feels that there is something elliptical about her treasury of trophies:

The profusion of this testimony was hardly more striking than the confession of something missed, something hushed, which seemed to rise from it all and make it melancholy, like a reference to clappings which in the nature of things could now only be present as a silence: so that if the place was full of history it was the form without the fact, or at the most a redundancy of the one to a pinch of the other - the history of a mask, of a squeak, of a series of vain gestures (I, pp. 113-4).

The evisceration of the laurels slides into an anatomization, and a reification, of the actress, a technique the reader comes across in the early James. The moment Madame Carré 'presents' herself she almost falls apart. She is 'a red-faced raddled woman in a wig, with beady eyes, a hooked nose, and pretty hands'. The narrator devotes a whole page to describing the 'wires' in her face and the 'springs' of her



countenance and the instrument-like mouth (I,p.117). The effect of this 'absence' within 'presence' is irony, the trope of swerving. The anticlimax is that 'Madame Carre herself, the object of the trope, increasingly takes it over in the chapter. She satirizes Mrs. Rooth, rubbishes Miriam's potential and ironizes the English literary establishment. This doubles the output of irony, for the satirist is the one to be satired, and the character ridiculing the emptiness of the others is the one whose hollowness has just been underlined in the narrative.

The importance of the whole occasion, however, lies in its bearings on Miriam Rooth. How does the latter figure in this part of the show? The narrator reports that, even before the great artist makes her debut, 'The girl was very white; she huddled there, silent and rigid, frightened to death, staring, expressionless' (I,p.115). Moreover, the moment Madame Carre speaks to her, Miriam breaks into tears. This description gives the impression that Miriam is maskless. If that is the situation, the defence-mechanism of 'reaction-formation' is not operative. But if it is at work, Miriam's cowardice cannot be taken seriously, for in that case it will be a mere make-believe. This defence-mechanism entails that the character project herself as the opposite of what she really is: pusillanimous, if presumptuous; confused, if composed; and frightened to death, if challenging and alive with desire.

First, the narrator's discourse above is so dialogic that aporia becomes inevitable. He uses inconsistent epithets, and switches from the passive to the active voice. How is it

possible for Miriam to be 'staring' and 'expressionless' if she is not self-consciously projecting a certain persona, in the same way Nick simulates his schism? Are not her tears and her 'staring' two kinds of expression? Are not the tears a screen covering up her staring? The inquiry becomes even more pertinent when the reader recalls the way the narrator begins: 'Nash introduced the new-comers to his companions; but the younger of the two ladies gave no sign of lending herself to the transaction' (I,p.115). This statement confirms that what she does is a performance. Peter, who has a feeling that she is acting, returns to the incident twice in Chapters Ten and Eleven to point up this view: Miriam is simulating the character of the helpless ephebe, and 'her tears', as he says, 'had been a comedy' (I,192). Clearly, Miriam is trying to contain her powerful precursor.

The relation between the two actresses immediately takes the form of 'rivalry', especially from the precursor's point of view. Playing the concepts of 'nature' and 'nurture' against each other, the French actress tries to do what Nash has wanted her to do: 'to stop Miriam short'.<sup>36</sup> The great actress starts by defining Miriam out of the theatre. The latter is advised to get married, or to work as a governess. This is a victimization and 'a destruction of desire', as Bloom says. Miriam reads the other's performance and decodes it in the right way. First, she says to her, 'You think me actually pretty bad, don't you?' (I,p.135). Then she formulates her judgement in a way that anticipates her swerving from the old-actress's position: 'Madame Carre listens to me with adorable patience, and then



sends me about my business - oh in the prettiest way in the world' (I,p.136). The annotation signifies that she sees through the French actress, and knows that the latter's discourse is methodical and dualistic - it says something and means something else.

The transition from swerving to antithetical completion, or from 'clinamen' to 'tessera', occurs in the interval between Chapters Seven and Ten. The ratio of 'contraction and withdrawal' is replaced with that of 'representation and restitution'. The reversal is emphasized by the French predecessor herself. She tells Peter that Miriam 'charges me like a grenadier and asks me to give her ... private recitations all to herself' (I,p.187). Synecdoche, the image of the second ratio, structures the metaleptic change. If the earlier actress gives recitations, she will become a part of the wholeness of the latecomer; and since her performance is like the role of the ephebe, she will take the first step towards metalepsis. Miriam pushes her into that position, as the old woman confesses: 'She won't open her mouth to me; what she wants is to make me say things to her'. She does make me - I don't know how - and she sits there gaping at me with her big eyes' (I,pp.187-8).

In another place, the old actress refers again to Miriam's 'pocket-like eyes'. The contrast here is significant, for while Miriam's eyes assert themselves, the old actress's seem troubled with the opacity and uncertainty of the horizon of expectations. This is related to the fact that the anxiety of

influence will be Rhadamanthine to one of them. One will be the authority, while the other will be struck blind, but at this stage both are under the same threat. The only signs of the outcome of the conflict are the eyes. Bloom explains that the eyes are symbolic of the artist's performance: 'A poet's fear of ceasing to be a poet frequently manifests itself also as a trouble of vision. Either he sees too clearly, with a tyranny of sharp fixation, as though his eyes asserted themselves against ... the world, or else his vision becomes veiled, and he sees things through an estranging mist'.<sup>37</sup>

At this stage, the French actress asks Miriam to recite something so that the former can pass a judgement. To be in the box is an instance of humbleness (kenosis). But from within this position, the acolyte tries to empty out the predecessor, as Miriam does. She pretends to submit herself to Madame Carré by imitating her, and measuring herself against the 'fullness' of the authority. But what happens is that while reciting, she undermines the precursor's position. Peter notices that 'What she mainly did was to reproduce with a crude fidelity, but in extraordinary detail, the intonation, the extraordinary quavers and cadences of her model'. Peter's annotation underlines the double-edged function of humbling the self. He believes that Miriam's imitation is 'a designed burlesque of her [Madame Carré's] manners, her airs and graces, her celebrated simpers and grimaces' (I, p. 192).

Once that burlesque is put in its true perspective of undoing the forebear, it becomes clear that it is the threshold



of 'daemonization', the function of which is 'the repression of the earlier'. But this stage is not mono-dimensional, for the precursor is fighting for survival. The way the French actress relates herself to Miriam is nothing but a form of terror, as Peter observes. Watching one of the rounds of their 'literary judo', he notices that the precursor does not keep the transaction in the literary arena. Instead, the French 'terrible initiatress' abuses her office, and uses Miriam as a kind of 'vile illustration' - which suggests that she has misread Miriam's performance, and has mistaken it for the Miriam's reality. Peter says that she 'undressed this young lady, as it were from head to foot, turned her inside out'. Her 'ferocious analysis' and 'special vocabulary' leave Miriam in a context of 'cruelty' (I,p.197). In his latest book, Harold Bloom says, 'we love authority but authority does not love us in return'.<sup>38</sup> Miriam is aware of the antagonist's methodology. She tells Peter that her 'mistress' shows 'a kind of rage for breaking her in' (I,p.222). Despite this, the old woman fails to destroy Miriam. The rage turns out to be the 'salutary terror' James mentions in The Awkward Age.

In Chapter Ten, 'Sherringham saw with surprise and amusement that the keen French woman, who had in her long life exhausted every adroitness, was in a manner helpless and coerced ... [and] was reduced to the last line of defence' (I,p.191). The tropes of the fourth ratio are behind the decline of the precursor. 'Hyperbole', 'litotes' and their images of 'high and low', represent the pinnacle she has reached; and the bathos that has befallen her. She has been

'hyperbolically high', but now she is 'litotically low'. By contrast, Miriam, coming from the 'lowest' point of departure, is ascending to the 'highest' position. Interestingly enough, her going in the morning to Madame Carre's place is a kind of ascent, for the place is a slope. Peter notices that she was always 'climbing the Rue de Constantinople on the shady side' and that the 'greatest amusement perhaps was to recognise the pretty sentiment of earliness' (I,p.222). Earliness is the ephebe's ultimate objective, for it remedies belatedness.

However, the humanization of authority and the daemonization of the acolyte occurs at the end of Book Second which is symbolically the ending of Madame Carre herself. Talking about Miriam, she tells Peter, 'She has most things. She will go far. It's the first time in my life of my beginning with a mistake. But don't tell her. I don't flatter her. She'll be too puffed up' (I,p.232). This confession, which recalls what Gloriani says to Mallet about Roderick Hudson, confirms that Miriam, the 'jeune Anglaise', has triumphed over Madame Carre, the 'Balzac of actresses'.

The function of 'daemonization' is to generalize away the uniqueness of the precursor, by referring to her in a humanizing way, as James does to Shakespeare. Miriam Rooth uses the same word (woman) that James uses in his letter to Mrs. H. Ward (the one about Miss Bretherton). Miriam says, 'I don't care if I'm of her tribe artistically ... I'm in the same style as that woman'. She adds, 'Oh I know all about her - I know all about great actors. But that won't prevent me from speaking



divine English' (I,p.205). The word 'woman' replaces 'actress', undermines Madame Carré's artistic position, and by implication, canonizes Miriam's.

Miriam's next step is to 'sublimate' her triumph by embarking on a course different from the precursor's, and endowing herself with the autonomy of scope and voice, which corresponds to 'curtailment' and 'solitude', the functions of the penultimate stage of the conflict (askesis). The ephebe repeatedly underlines her divergence, as in this statement: 'Madame Carré's too philosophic. I shall never be like her' (I,p.206). As a matter of fact, Chapter Nineteen is a register of 'curtailment' and 'solitude'. In it, Miriam confirms that she will swerve completely from the old woman's 'tragic mode', and will slough off the French frame of mind, along with the French monotony. Instead, her own approach will be a synthesis of variety and modernity, like that of the terra-cotta ephebe, whose modernity is the sign of his swerving from the old man of the bald bust. Miriam says, 'I want to do the modern', and 'I don't believe you're various ... You're pure tragedy' (I,p.346), which recalls James's swerve from Shakespeare.

But Miriam's becoming the great actress does not mean the burial of the precursor for, in the end, the acolyte gives a lease of life to the precursor. Peter anticipates this stage in Chapter Twenty. The narrator says, 'Peter perfectly foresaw the day when his young friend would make indulgent allowances for poor Madame Carré, patronising her as a good woman of good intentions' (I,p.350; my emphasis). This proleptic divination

informs the trope and the imagery of the last ratio (apophrades). 'Metalepsis', the trope of reversal, entails the transumption of 'early' and 'late'. By patronizing her precursor, Miriam becomes the 'earlier', and transforms her elder into a 'latecomer'. This reversal has been scenically enacted in Chapter Ten, in which the two actresses imitate and become each other. And indeed the day Peter envisions comes in Chapter Forty-Four. Miriam says, 'Everywhere I live I see that the wisdom of the ages was in the experience of dear old Madame Carré - was in a hundred things she told me'. This echoes what the French woman herself has said about her own precursor, and the 'reverence' that James has for Shakespeare (II,p.309). Miriam's return to the days of 'flooded apprenticeship' is a sign of the completion of the anxiety of influence. The greater sign, of course, is that Miriam has done what Madame Carré has never been able to do: she has become the English Rachel.<sup>39</sup>



- <sup>1</sup>M. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, translated by Caryl Emerson, History of Literature, 8 (Manchester, 1984), p.30.
- <sup>2</sup>W.W. Robson, 'Henry James's The Tragic Muse', Mandrake (1954-5), 281-95 (p.286).
- <sup>3</sup>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p.248.
- <sup>4</sup>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p.247.
- <sup>5</sup>L. Edel, The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel (Westport, Conn., 1976; first published, 1957), p.24.
- <sup>6</sup>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p.29.
- <sup>7</sup>L. Edel, 'Introduction' to The Tragic Muse (New York, 1960), pp.vii-xvii (ppix-x).
- <sup>8</sup>W. Booth, 'Introduction' to Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, pp.xiii-xxvii (p.xxi).
- <sup>9</sup>James's oeuvre demonstrates that he consistently swerves from the stereotype and the eccentric; but goes for the polyphonic hybrid. See James's article on Our Mutual Friend in Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers, edited by L. Edel (New York, 1984); James on John Lawrence Toole in The Scenic Art, edited by A. Wade (London, 1949). For fiction, suffice it here to mention The American, The Reverberator, The Tragic Muse, 'The Great Condition', 'The Diary of a Man of Fifty', 'A Bundle of Letters', 'The Point of View', and The Awkward Age.
- <sup>10</sup>D.J. Gordon and J. Stokes, 'The Reference of The Tragic Muse', in The Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James (London, 1972), pp.81-167 (p.81).
- <sup>11</sup>James's polyphonic disposition is repeatedly underlined in The Art of the Novel: pp.19, 21, 36-7, 42-3, 48, 53, 60, 70, 73, 88, 105, 128, 130, 151, 155, 156, 173, 214, 259, 271, 298-9, 327, and 328.
- <sup>12</sup>A. Bellringer, 'The Tragic Muse: The Objective Center' Journal of American Studies, 4 (1970), 73-89 (pp.82-3).
- <sup>13</sup>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, pp. 32, 36, 287.
- <sup>14</sup>See Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics; and Karl Marx's letter to Lassalle in David Craig, ed., Marxists on Literature: An Anthology (London, 1975), pp. 207-9. (Bakhtin quotes two critics who argue that Shakespeare creates characters independent of himself, pp. 33, 66. Similarly, Marx says to Lassalle, 'You would then have to Shakespearize more of your own accord, while I chalk up against your Schillering, your transforming of individuals into mere speaking tubes of the spirit of the time', pp.208-9).
- <sup>15</sup>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p.34.
- <sup>16</sup>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, p.54.
- <sup>17</sup>The three terms, 'dualism', 'psychological monism' and 'aesthetic monism' are taken from David W. Smit, The Language of a Master: Theories of Style and the Late Writing of Henry James (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), pp.16-18. (See the section on The Europeans in the Introduction to the thesis.)
- <sup>18</sup>G. Genette, Narrative Discourse, translated by Jane E. Lewin (Oxford, 1980), p.115.
- <sup>19</sup>The concept of 'stylization' permeates James's fiction in the



form of 'delicacy'. I have done a survey of this concept in all James's novels and tales, and the result is fascinating. James consistently conceptualizes the term: delicacy as 'unimpulsiveness', 'aesthetic performance', and 'being the self and the other'. These functions clearly feed into dialogism, stylization and the interplay of consciousnesses. The perfect example is The Golden Bowl. For the structure is as fragile as is the 'golden bowl'; but this 'delicate' design survives through the 'delicacy' of all the characters.

- 20 D.J. Schneider, 'The Theme of Freedom in James's The Tragic Muse', Connecticut Review, 7 (1974), 5-15 (pp.6-7).
- 21 W.R. Goetz, 'The Allegory of Representation in The Tragic Muse', Journal of Narrative Technique, 8 (1978-9), 151-64 (p.154).
- 22 E. H. Lockridge, 'A Vision of Art: Henry James's The Tragic Muse', Modern Fiction Studies, 12 (1966), 83-92 (p.90).
- 23 'Henry James's The Tragic Muse', p.294.
- 24 M. Torgovnick, The Visual Arts, Pictorialism and the Novel: James, Lawrence and Woolf (Princeton, New Jersey, 1985), p.75.
- 25 K. Graham, Henry James: The Drama of fulfilment: An Approach to the Novels (London, 1975), p.84.
- 26 'The Reference of The Tragic Muse', p.82.
- 27 See F.T. Palgrave, The Poetical Works of Walter Scott (London, 1897; first published, 1866), p.119.  
     'Yet Clare's questions must I shun;  
     Must separate Constance from the Nun -  
     O, what a tangled web we weave,  
     When first we practise to deceive!'
- 28 D. Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James (Cambridge, 1962), p.65.
- 29 Henry James: The Drama of Fulfilment, p.94.
- 30 See John Bayley, The Characters of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality (London, 1960).
- 31 M. Jacobson, Henry James and the Mass Market (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1983), p.79.
- 32 'The reference of the Tragic Muse', p.95.
- 33 H. James, Watch and Ward (New York, 1959), p.29.
- 34 For the extra-artistic approach to parenthood, see Sister M. Corona Sharp, O.S.U., 'Fatherhood in Henry James', University of Toronto Quarterly, 35 (1965-6), 279-92.  
     (She classifies fathers into 'Tyrants', 'Adventurers', 'Vanquished', and 'Good' ones.)
- 35 H. Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (New York, 1973), p.56.
- 36 See 'The Allegory of Representation in The Tragic Muse',  
     ('... the issue of nature versus nurture turns out to be partially moot'. Miriam manages 'to subsume technique in her own simple stage performance', p.159.)
- 37 The Anxiety of Influence, p.78.
- 38 H. Bloom, Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), p.62.
- 39 For the story and the significance of Rachel see 'The Reference of The Tragic Muse'; and A.R. Tinter, 'Miriam as the English Rachel: Gerome's Portrait of the Tragic Muse', in Critical Essays on Henry James: The Early Novels, edited by J. Gargano (Boston, Mass., 1987), pp.185-97.



CHAPTER FOUR

## Henpecking and Cockfighting:

## Influence

in the Fin de Siècle Tales of Henry James

Most of James's tales of the 1880's and 1890's are based upon the theme of influence. Their common denominator is the conjunction of an ephebe and a precursor in a literary context. The predecessor is always represented in the same form: a literary celebrity, a master of the muses, or a lion in the jungle of letters - Mark Ambient ('The Author of Beltraffio'), Henry St. George ('The Lesson of the Master'), Dencombe ('The Middle Years'), Paraday ('The Death of the Lion'), Vereker ('The Figure in the Carpet'), George Dane ('The Great Good Place'), Ashton Doyne ('The Real Right Thing'), and Morgan Mallow in ('The Tree of Knowledge'). But the ephebe takes a variety of voices: a disciple (Paul Overt; 'The Lesson of the Master'), an acolyte (Dr. Hugh; 'The Middle Years'), a journalist (the narrator in 'The Death of the Lion'), a biographer (Withermore; 'The Real Right Thing'), and a son (Lancelot; 'The Tree of Knowledge'). However, despite the polarity of the precursor and the acolyte in all these stories, and the numerous anthologies of the same tales, the theme of the anxiety of influence has continued to be skated over.

According to Matthiessen, in his Henry James: Stories of Writers and Artists, the tales he has anthologized function as a guide-book for young artists. He quotes James's description of the Prefaces and applies it to the tales themselves: they

are 'a sort of comprehensive manual or vademecum for aspirants in our arduous profession'.<sup>1</sup> Edel, as expected, rejects this intra-artistic focus, and puts the short stories into a biographical perspective. He observes that in the late eighties and early nineties some younger artists came into James's life and generated the 'Legend of the Master'. The tales, therefore, are simply a belated register of these relationships, or a fictionalization of the biographical. 'We catch their reflection', Edel says, 'in his [James's] literary life. In these there is always a young acolyte, a youthful spirit touched by the art of the great writer' (LHJ,II,p.41).

Almost the same tales have been anthologized by Frank Kermode in The Figure in the Carpet and other Stories. Kermode postulates that the perspective informing all these tales is 'silk purses' and 'sow's ears'. He says, 'Again and again in these tales we are asked, from one angle or another, to contemplate the position of the artist in an 'age of trash triumphant', and we need not be coy about suggesting that they allude, however guardedly, to James's view of his own plight'.<sup>2</sup> Stephen Spender, interviewed recently by David Leeming in Henry James Review, explains how the 'trash' trauma is manifested in the tales themselves. Seconding Leeming's point about 'the new artist revealing his lonely vision to a greatly diminished body of listeners or observers in a society that has little use for such visions', Spender says, 'This is particularly evident in the stories of artists and writers where the relationship between artist and disciple-critic is so emphasized'.<sup>3</sup>



(Spender, who seconds Matthiessen's approach, is the only one so far to describe the ephebe as a critic. This confirms that the acolyte is not simply a youthful spirit touched by the precursor's art, but an antagonist, and a possible substitute, which feeds back into the influence theme).

What Matthiessen, Edel and Kermode underline is undoubtedly relevant, but it falls short of understanding the common denominator which makes these tales anthologizable. What I want to argue is that these works cannot be fully explicated without recourse to the anxiety of influence. Matthiessen's vademecum is one aspect of the alternative approach. It seems like a proto-type to Bloom's hermeneutic perspective or manual-like 'practical criticism', but it is vulnerable. Its vulnerability arises from its lacking focus and definition. Are the tales an Aristotelian poetics of writing? Are they the best exemplification of the relationship between art and life? Or what are they? The questions are infinite because Matthiessen's Baedeker is almost blank.

Kermode confirms that influence is embedded in the period: 'The eighties and the nineties saw a huge expansion in the reading public, or, if you like, an enlarged market for trash'. As a reaction to this trivialization, some novelists, he adds, have chosen 'to take the novel seriously as art. The examples of Flaubert and Turgenev were much cited, the large loose baggy monsters of the English tradition deplored'.<sup>4</sup> The concept of influence, the quest for masters to imitate and emulate, then,

is a feature of the last two decades of the nineteenth century, but Kermode does not follow it through. His introduction suffers from bittiness.

Similar reservations apply to Edel's statement. There is no doubt, first of all, that the tales, as he observes, are populated by acolytes and masters, but his biographical point d'appui does not explain why the stories themselves are conducting a massacre of masters. Why does James commit all the precursors to the cemetery of fiction while allowing the ephebes to dance on the graves of the masters? Greville Fane is dead. John Delavoy is dead. Ashton Doyne is dead. Dencombe dies. Paraday dies and Vereker dies too. Moreover, if death is to be taken metaphorically, Edel's statement will never be in a position to account for the transumption that frames these tales. Overt, as his tag-name suggests, replaces Henry St. George and becomes the Master's master. Hugh, the young reviewer, 'doctors' and fathers Dencombe in 'The Middle Years'. The anonymous young narrator, in 'The Death of the Lion', manages and envelops Neil Paraday. Corvick, 'the little demon of subtlety', stultifies the Sphinx, and replaces Hugh Vereker. Similarly, since his debut, the young artist in 'The Great Good Place' exchanges places with George Dane.

These repetitions create a pattern, and a pattern suggests a system, and a system 'governs every line...chooses every word ... dots every i, [and] places every comma' (CT, IX, p.284). This 'figure in the carpet' has little to do with the autobiographical fictionalization, the didactic teleology, or



the clash with the trash. The concept that explains the juxtaposition of ephebes and precursors so systematically is the anxiety of influence, as 'The Author of Beltraffio' and 'Lesson of the Master', together with other tales, will demonstrate in detail.

### I. The Author of 'The Author of Beltraffio'

'The Author of Beltraffio', an unfairly neglected tale, is thought of as an example of the dichotomy between art and the world or ethics and aesthetics, which recalls the critical reception of The Tragic Muse. Kermode, for instance, says, 'The author of Beltraffio' is a treatment of the topic he [James] touched upon ... in "The Art of Fiction" in the same year: a narrow public morality as the enemy of the art of fiction'<sup>5</sup>. This conflict, he adds, will be more intense, for it is between husband and wife. In another place he postulates that, 'The scheme of the story is simple and virtually allegorical: the life of art versus the life of evangelical conscience, ending in the sacrifice of life'.<sup>6</sup> This approach to the tale does not justify the central role played by the ephebe. As far as the narrator's multiple and intricate relationships with Mark Ambient, Beatrice and Dolcino are concerned, the ethical discourse, as will be argued, is only a second narrative. It is the primal story that makes the tale what it really is. There should be another reason for bringing the apprentice into the arena, and appointing him as the first-person narrator of the tale.

Kermode has a sort of answer for this: 'the conflict between husband and wife called for an observer, and the observer was characterized as young, "ingenuous" and American, a dedicated admirer of the great Mark Ambient'. This is a begging of the question. Is there any justification, conventional or otherwise, for using the first-person narrator to report a family-disintegration? Kermode flies in the face of verisimilitude and the Jamesian delicacy. Familial affairs, being intimate and private, require any kind of focalization but the first-person. Furthermore, even if the marital ambivalence tolerates this point of view, why should the narrator be 'young', of the same profession, and specifically fascinated by the 'great' artist, not the wife?<sup>7</sup>

The unfolding of the narrative itself makes clear that the husband-wife schism is a belated story. The narrator embarks on his project to see the Master. When he does not find him, he absents himself in Italy. He chooses not to call on the wife although she is in the country. The ephebe is Master-minded, not a family-affairs reporter. These premises belong to the anxiety of influence proper. The importance of the husband-wife controversy does not arise from the kind of bearing it has on art and the family structure, or the way it relates to the conflict between the muses and morality. It is registered and foregrounded by the narrator so that it may function as a discreet vehicle, or a second narrative, for the mystification of the central problematic, which will be referred to as the first narrative.



Once again, the problematic which is camouflaged by the narrator, and consequently missed by critics, is not the one between husband and wife. It is the tripartite narrative that relates the narrator to the Ambients. His project consists of the humanization of the master; the termination of his rival Dolcino; and the transformation of Mrs. Ambient into a belated ephebe. He successfully accomplishes his multiplots. The master is humanized; Dolcino dies helpless; and Beatrice, after being converted into a bewitched ephebe, dies too. The devices the narrator employs to submerge his designs consist of what Gérard Genette calls the 'achronic' discourse: the conflation of the past, the present, and the future by means of analepsis, prolepsis, and other kinds of temporal discordance. Another stratagem is the displacement of different levels of narrative. The narrator represents the central as paranthetical; and the irrelevant, as crucial. Moreover, he removes from the text what should be in it, and interpolates anecdotes that should not be there in the first place. In short, he does not limit himself to telling or not telling, representation or misrepresentation, but manipulates more complex paraphernalia of narration so that the primal story may be completely camouflaged.

Hence the first-person narration in 'The Author of Beltraffio' is appropriate for two reasons. First, the crux of the tale is the transaction between the acolyte and the master, and as in most of James's influence-tales, the narrator is either the ephebe or the precursor. Secondly, the achronic form of the tale - a vehicle of the 'temporal sabotage' - calls for this kind of focalization. Genette says, 'The "first-person"

narrative lends itself better than any other to anticipation, by the very fact of its avowedly retrospective character, which authorizes the narrator to allude to the future and in particular to his present situation, for these to some extent form part of his role'.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike Kermode, Matthiessen says that 'The Author of Beltraffio' is about aesthetics and the aesthete. Morality is redundant. James 'set himself to dramatize the aesthetic gospel of the eighties ... Nature faithfully copies art in Ambient's surroundings'.<sup>9</sup> Then he puts forward a model for relating the tale to other works by James and comparing all of them with Walter Pater. The wife does not come into Matthiessen's reading, neither does the ephebe. Instead, the story is to be relegated, as a sort of springboard, to a topical narrative.

Of course, it is worth asking at this stage about the whereabouts of Edel. How does he pigeonhole 'The Author of Beltraffio'? In his introduction to Volume Five of the Complete Tales, he dismisses the intra-artistic approach and comes out with what seems to him to be the story of the story. After giving a synopsis of the work, he says, 'A superficial criticism has tended to call this tale one of James's "stories of writers": but the author of Beltraffio's being a writer is incidental to the central drama'. 'It is in reality a Medea-tale, of a female figure who sacrifices innocence to her own cruel destructive vision ... "The Author of 'Beltraffio'" is a harbinger of "The Pupil" and "The Turn of the Screw," those stories in which an adult world makes its cruel offerings



on the altars of its egotism'. (CT,V,p.11). He reiterates his attitude towards Beatrice whenever he comes across her. In the biography, for instance, he says, 'The delicately-told yet lurid little tale culminates in a violent Medea-like action: the mother prefers her child dead rather than have him survive to a pagan-spirited father' (LHJ,II,p.190).

The first part of Edel's statement - dismissing the intra-artistic subject - is most likely meant to be a criticism of Matthiessen. The latter's anthology is entitled Stories of Writers and Artists. Edel's position here is not unjustified if it is only against Matthiessen's version of the artistic theme, for the latter does not argue his case. But if Edel is shrugging off any approach that foregrounds the intra-artistic, then his position will not be any better than Matthiessen's. The tale itself, when put into the perspective of the anxiety of influence, will confirm that it is about the transaction between the young artist and the earlier one, as Edel himself has observed (LHJ,II,p.41). Furthermore, how can the artistic question in a story by such a self-conscious author as James, about an author-narrator and about the author of Beltraffio be said to be redundant?

The second part of Edel's judgement, describing Beatrice as being evil and an epitome of the 'terrible mother', is even more questionable. For he has chosen a label that is open to different readings. Some of them contradict Edel's own position. In the tale, for instance, the narrator observes that Beatrice is not one of the Gorgons. Watching her, he gets the

impression that she should have been a source of inspiration for her husband: 'In looking for the reason why he should have married her, I saw, more than before that she was, physically speaking, a wonderfully cultivated human plant - that she must have given him many ideas and images. It was impossible to be more pencilled, more garden-like, more delicately tinted and petalled' (CT,V,p.337). This makes her a muse. Mark Ambient himself bears testimony to her beauty and benignity: 'she's so pretty too, herself! Don't you think so? She was, at any rate, when I married her'(p.335). (The last part of the Master's testimony should be read against him not his wife, for it suggests that he has 'consumed' what has been muse-like in her). These two statements signify that the reader must not take Edel's attitude uncritically. A story may be good, James says, only until another is told.

The second story is the other voice in Edel's own diction. He sets out to condemn Beatrice but, ironically, echoes Ambient and the narrator, and says something that, though intended to be stigmatizing, exonerates her. The way he categorizes Beatrice recalls Medusa not Medea. The significations of these two mythical names are diametrically opposite to each other. Medusa, the mortal woman who has been transformed by Athena into a Gorgon, stands, according to Olderr's Symbolism: A Comprehensive Dictionary, for "'The terrible mother; primal sexuality; sin; [and] the dangerous female'. But Medea, the princess of Colchis, who has helped Jason get the Golden Fleece, is associated with that treasure itself. The Golden Fleece, according to Olderr again, symbolizes the 'conquest of



the impossible; spiritual knowledge; supreme strength through purity of soul; wisdom; [and] hidden treasure'. Similarly; according to Oxford Classical Dictionary, Medea has magic; 'shows a certain tendency to pass into a goddess'; is renowned for love; and is capable of rejuvenation. After helping Jason, she is chased by her brother Apsyrtus, in the same way as Beatrice is pursued by the narrator. In other words, she figures in the first instance as the muse, the helper, the lover, and the victim, rather than just the terrible mother or the dangerous female which she became in response to her experience of love. Therefore, it can be said that while labelling 'The Author of Beltraffio' as a 'Medea-tale', Edel has unwittingly described it as a story about the Golden Fleece of art. His claim is that she has preferred killing her son to exposing him to Ambient's art. But Dolcino's death is not as easily categorizable as Edel supposes. It is an enigma that needs explication, and this cannot be achieved without recourse to the anxiety of influence, as embedded in the indirections of the narrative discourse.

What I want to argue is that, like the first-person narrator of The Aspern Papers, the first-person narrator of 'The Author of Beltraffio', while supposedly relating a conflict between a husband and his wife over their child, actually narrates his own 'crime'. This is not a digression into the ethical, or a discovery of another criminal. For such acts belong to the repertoire of the anxiety of influence. The narrator has to terminate, in a metaphorical sense, his predecessor as the only way for himself to be the new Master.

But Ambient's departure will not help, for he has an heir to the throne, a son. The problem is that a master can have only one ephebe at a time, exactly as an ephebe can have only one predecessor. Hence Dolcino's presence generates a narrative of projection and substitution, and an inter-ephebal rivalry.

This is what most of the tales demonstrate and have in common. It is the case in 'The Death of the Lion', in which the American female ephebe is kept out of the arena by the other acolyte, significantly a first-person narrator too. He does not kill her, but he does to her exactly what the message embedded in her name instructs him to do. She is called Miss Hurter (hurt her). He prevents her from coming into contact with Paraday, as if it were a taboo for her to 'woo' the master while there is another ephebe. The conflict is very dramatic, despite the fact that Fanny Hurter is as peaceful as Dolcino. But the moment the narrator humanizes Paraday, and manufactures his death, he starts to tolerate Fanny, as if he had become the master; and she, the ephebe. Inter-ephebal rivalry is over and there is a possibility that they may get married.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, ephebes have only one precursor. Dr. Hugh, in 'The Middle Years', has to give up the Countess and the fortunes she promises only to be with Dencombe. Leolin, too, demonstrates all the time that he does not want his mother, Mrs. Stormer, to be his precursor. He wants the other novelist, significantly again a first-person narrator, to be his predecessor ('Greville Fane'). 'The Figure in the Carpet' confirms the same principle of composition - one precursor at a



time. Vereker, Corvick and Gwendolen succeed each other, but they are never spatialized as simultaneous precursors for the eternal ephebe, who is also a first-person narrator. So far 'Greville Fane' is the only tale in which the son and the ephebe are one but with mitigated anxiety. 'The Tree of Knowledge' stands closer to 'The Author of Beltraffio'. In 'The Tree of Knowledge', Lancelot is both the son and the ephebe, both Dolcino and the narrator. The way the literary ephebe grows out of, and outgrows, the literal one is central to the tale. Lancelot, the young artist, is in conflict with Lancelot the non-artist. The first does to the second exactly what the narrator does to Dolcino: he 'terminates' him, which cannot be called a 'crime' in the literal sense of the word.

Projecting the two Lancelots upon the narrator and Dolcino will help put things into perspective. The narrator, as a possible 'son' to Ambient, has been overlooked by most critics on the assumption that the tale has only one child: Dolcino. This arises from the literalism of reading. But once the literal is liberated, it becomes clear that Mark Ambient has two sons, one secular and consequently doomed to die by something like (inter-ephebal) fever; the other metaphorical and understandably 'fever-proof'. The hierarchical distinction is reflected in the fact that, according to the Notebooks, Dolcino already exists in the germ of the story, the inartistic fabula, whereas the narrator belongs to art proper.

The entry in the Notebooks dated March 26th, 1884, in contrast to the readings it has generated, prioritizes the tale

over the anecdote, and emphasizes the principle that the 'germ' should not infect the work. If successful, the latter does not figure as the same 'air-blown grain' (AN, p.236; see the section on genealogy in Chapter Two). The entry itself consists of four parts. First there is the concept of 'hysterical aestheticism', the state of 'being impresario - even to morbidity - with the spirit of Italy, the love of beauty, of art, the aesthetic view of life'. Secondly, there is the schism between husband and wife. She represents the 'narrow, cold, Calvinistic wife, a rigid moralist'. Third is the technical aspect or the question of execution, where James's treatment of the germ really begins: 'The story should be told by a young American who comes out to England and calls upon the poet (he should be a poet or a novelist or both) to pay his homage ... it is his impression, afterwards related ... that constitutes the narrative ... He guesses' (my emphasis). Finally, the entry classifies the kind of compositional treatment the project requires: the 'prodigious delicacy of touch' (Notebooks, pp.57-58).

The first two constituents belong to the extra-artistic anecdote and their function is over the moment the literary product takes shape. The latter two are the artistic frames of reference that give the tale its form and identity. When these questions of execution are foregrounded, it will become apparent that the anxiety of influence comes, literally and metaphorically, first in the text. The three narratives in the tale - narrator-Ambient, narrator-Dolcino, and narrator-Beatrice - are three variations on the anxiety of influence, or what Genette calls a 'repeated narrative': the



frequency is singular in the story, but multiple in the work. The way the narrator relates himself to Mark Ambient is the first manifestation of anxiety, and it is rendered in the form of an analeptic retrospection written at two temporal removes from the story. The narrator is both a new master (the one doing the retrospective narrative), and an ephebe (the theme of the analepsis). The second manifestation is the inter-ephebal rivalry or jealousy between the narrator and Dolcino (who is the real son?). The third, which completes the narrator's triumph over Ambient, is the narrator's 'conversion' of Beatrice into a belated ephebe: the new Master needs followers.

The beginning of the tale perfectly exemplifies that the anxiety of influence comes literally and metaphorically first in the text. It sets the scene for the Master and the acolyte, brings into play the terminology of influence, and maps out the major preoccupation of the tale. The beginning is:

Much as I wished to see him, I had kept my letter of introduction for three weeks in my pocket-book. I was nervous and timid about meeting him - conscious of youth and ignorance, convinced that he was tormented by strangers, especially by my country-people, and not exempt from the suspicion that he had the irritability as well as the brilliancy of genius (p.303).

The first impression of this passage is that the ephebe is playing with the discourse and injecting it with the opposite of what it seems to be saying. Hence the dialogic existence of the two semantic structures. In the first sentence, the main

clause - 'I had kept ... my pocket-book' - clearly reflects self-control and composure, and suggests that the ephebe, who has crossed the Atlantic driven the worship of the master, is now beyond the preliminary stage of influence (perhaps crossing the Atlantic is metaphorical too). He has the predecessor's magic and fascination in his 'pocket-book'. This reading is substantiated by the sub-ordinate clause - 'Much as I wished to see him' - which seems to be stating something else but is not. The words smack of desire, and confirm that the ephebe has chosen his literary Laius. But they also suggest that this gamut of sensations is curtailed. The syntagmatic arrangement of the two clauses is imitative of the change.

The shift from the first half to the second recalls the transfer from swerving to antithetical opposition (clinamen to tessera). The syntactic pattern, the adverbial clause of concession, embeds the corrective swerve. Infatuation is to be kept under control, and spontaneity is to be made self-conscious. Had the narrator arranged his statement the other way round, its surface structure would have ceased to be like that of the anxiety of influence, but he did not. As it stands, his discourse is strewn with the paraphernalia of the first phase: the concepts of 'absence' and 'presence' and the trope of irony. Indeed, instead of the imagery, the concepts themselves are enacted. The 'presence' of the Master is reversed into 'absence'. He is in the vicinity, but that propinquity is folded away in the form of the 'letter of introduction', and 'pocketed' in the ephebe's notebook. This is



ironic; for it aborts an event - long-awaited for - into a non-event. The first meeting between the ephebe and the precursor is at the very penultimate moment swerved from.

'Absence' and 'presence' are central to the tale, but not from Todorov's perspective. 'Absence' is not a holy grail the characters keep looking for, but never find. It is an ironic image which creates a vacuum to be filled in by the ('presence' of) ephebe. The two concepts, as in The Tragic Muse, regulate the beginning of 'The Author of Beltraffio'. Wherever the ephebe is, the precursor happens to be somewhere else. The narrator comes to England only to find out that Mark Ambient is not in the country. He goes to Italy while the Master is absent in the East. The action is always retarded, which suggests that such a symmetry is designed for a certain purpose.

That purpose is the fading away of the great novelist, and the foregrounding of the ephebe. The latter will be the only character on the stage for a whole year. During this period, his perception of, and the way of relating himself to, the precursor are transformed. Hence when he dispatches the letter of introduction to the Master, he sends it with 'a note of my own' (p.305) - a clear sign that he has acquired a sense of power and become capable of speaking with his own voice. All this individuation has taken shape during the interplay of 'presence' and 'absence', and the ensuing narrative in Italy. It is there that the narrator excavates some of the arcana of the great author. The result is rewarding: 'My visit to Italy',

he says, 'opened my eyes to a good many things' (p.304). Time tones down infatuation, and redresses the balance between preceptor and pupil.

Behind the whole play of 'presence' and 'absence', as revealed in the first sentence, lurks the 'defence-mechanism' of 'reaction-formation'. For what is central for the ephebe at this stage is the concept of self-misrepresentation. He does not want his 'youth' or his 'ignorance' to come to the surface. So he interferes with the horizontality of the narrative to give himself enough time for a recasting, a displacement of the real, and a reshuffle of all the factors of the situation.

Amidst this corrective swerve, the shift to the antithetical position ('tessera') is conceived. The function of the latter ratio is to transfer correction into completion, and swerving into opposition. What happens in the passage confirms that the reversal to the antithetical position is already under way. It is reflected in the kind of interplay between the two ratios. The shift is manifested in the form of arrested impulsiveness, confiscated curiosity and a sublimation from reflex to reflection. The ephebe is represented as being 'nervous', but his awareness of the co-ordinates of the situation helps him, in James's language, possess his own possession. Similarly, he is portrayed as being handicapped and ironized by 'youth', but his self-consciousness about his position in time, youth, smacks of precocity and hardening, exactly as his awareness of his 'ignorance' functions as a kind of knowledge.



After 'ignorance' and 'nervousness', comes 'conviction', which encodes a different position. The acolyte says, 'I was convinced that he [Ambient] was tormented by strangers, and especially by my country-people, and not exempt from the suspicion that he had the irritability as well as the brilliancy of genius'. Two manifestations of dissociation are signalled here. The ephebe is isolating himself from his own people in a straightforward manner. The impact is self-sublimation: defining himself against and, out of, his tradition. His 'people' are referred to as 'strangers', that is, 'outsiders' as far as the institution of art is concerned. By implication, he becomes an 'insider'.

Self-definition is emphasized with delicacy and subtlety in the part referring to Mark Ambient. The latter is described as having both the 'irritability' and the 'brilliancy' of genius. The juxtaposition of 'irritability' and 'brilliancy' is not only paradoxical, but methodical and deconstructive. The novelist who has these two traits is most likely to have neither. The crux of the game is its craftiness. The way the narrator formulates his discourse doubles the subversive output. The two words, 'irritability' and 'brilliancy' are zeugmatic, and the zeugma itself is impregnated with irony. The result is a subversion of what is positive in the Master, and an emphasis of what is negative in him, which ironizes the proportional symmetry of Mark Ambient's character. To say that he is 'not exempt from' irritability means that he is a genius with a little blemish - just a stylistic evasion of saying something that will be too good to be true. But to postulate

that he is 'not exempt from' the brilliancy of genius signifies that the Master is, by and large, an imbecile. A zeugmatic expression - short and tall, vicious and virtuous, stupid and stupendous - is deconstructive. (The same argument applies to another paradox in which the narrator thinks of Ambient as a case of 'a happy combination': looking like 'an English gentleman and a man of genius' at the same time (p.306).

The third phase - humbleness, isolation, undoing and regression (kenosis) - is at the core of the passage too. The representation of the self as doomed, belated, destitute of all chances and infinitely inferior to the predecessor is what this phase stands for. And it is there like a courtesy in the ephebe's performance. Once, while talking about the quest for completion, the narrator says that Mark Ambient has played Noah, loaded everything in his ark and left nothing for posterior ephebes. He puts it this way, 'There are some people who regret that [Ambient] having gone so far he did not go further; but I regret nothing (putting aside two or three of the motives I just mentioned), for he arrived at perfection and I don't see how you can go beyond that' (p.323). The precursor's perfection is a cul de sac for any acolyte. It is 'fullness' on the side of the predecessor, and total 'emptiness' for the latecomer. These two antonyms are, as known by now, the imagery of humbling the self (kenosis). But is this phase a terminus or simply a 'withdrawal' preparing the stage for another 'coming'? Vincent Leitch explains how this kind of dialectic functions: 'a negative moment' followed by 'a crossing'. The crossing or 'coming' is now 'daemonization'.<sup>11</sup>



The fourth ratio - humanizing the precursor, and generalizing away his uniqueness (daemonization) - is the most important subtlety in the passage. The ephebe, while pretending to defend Mark Ambient against the 'tormenting' Americans, fires, as seen above, his double-barrelled zeugma and puts paid to the earlier's uniqueness. A similar evisceration of the precursor occurs when they first meet. The narrator says, "I surveyed him, askance ... I had already - I had instantly seen that he was a delightful creature. His face is so well known that I needn't describe it" (p.306). 'A delightful creature', which recalls Miriam's calling the French actress a 'woman', does not refer to any 'unique' signified. Its range of signification, is encyclopaedic, or what Barthes calls 'degree zero'. It can mean anything from a Master to a hamster. Furthermore, a face that can be envisaged without any portrayal can be any face or no face at all. At least it does not recall an artist. To summarize both instances, the 'hyperbole' of imbecility and familiarization, the 'litotes' of genius and uniqueness, the 'high' proportion of the wrong characteristics, and the 'low' one of the right constitution, embroider a tapestry that does not embody a Master. It is simply the chiaroscuro of a caricatured clown.

Little wonder the acolyte distances himself from Ambient. This move is the function of the fifth phase. 'Askesis' comprises the imagery of 'inside' and 'outside', the defence-mechanism of 'sublimation', and the function of 'solitude'. All these are in the bulk and the surplus of the passage. The isolation the ephebe is working for is, when

looked at from another perspective, an act of 'sublimation'. Defining all the Americans as outsiders is a device for accommodating oneself in the literary institution. But this accommodation is not going to be in the vicinity of Mark Ambient anymore. Having humanized the Master, the narrator curtails him, as a step towards solitude. A clear example of this phase is defining Ambient out of the literary establishment. The narrator says that Ambient 'was better as a talker than as a writer; that is if the extraordinary finish of his written prose be really as some people have maintained, a fault' (p.320-1). Such a curtailment of the precursor will be reiterated in 'The Lesson of the Master', where the ephebe thinks of the Master not as an artist but as a stock-broker, and not as a writer of books but as a book-keeper. All correspond to Miriam's calling her precursor a 'woman' and to James's argument that the enigma is Shakespeare the 'man', not the artist. However, having sublimated himself away from the 'shocking conjecture' (Ambient), the narrator rounds off the anxiety of influence with a reversal of places (apophrades).

This last phase uses the imagery of 'early' and 'late', the trope of 'metalepsis' (reversal), the defence-mechanisms of 'introjection' and 'projection', and has the function of 'resurrecting the dead'. Indeed, what the narrator manages to do perfectly exemplifies this repertoire. For instance, the first time the disadvantages of youth, belatedness and 'nervousness', are mentioned, they are attributed by the narrator to himself. But the reader is immediately told that the Master himself is ironized by



'irritability', which recalls the youthful limitation of 'nervousness'. At the same time, the Master is being dispossessed of the precursoral forte: genius. What will be left for the earlier in this case is the other limitation the ephebe has complained of: 'ignorance'. This confirms that the defence-mechanisms of 'introjection' and 'projection' are at work. The acolyte is internalizing, or introjecting, the genius and temperance that usually belong to the preceptor. And while making these his own property, the acolyte is casting out, or projecting, youth and belatedness, and irritability and ignorance, onto the Master. In fact, throughout the tale, the narrator keeps registering such moments in the precursor's performance as if to dispossess him of the artistic status and to ironize him with belated youth and overdue apprenticeship.

The clearest example that substantiates this point is what happens when Dolcino is suddenly reported unwell, as if hit by the uncanny evil eyes of the narrator. Ambient wants to see his child, but the mother refuses him access. The sister, Miss Ambient, explains Beatrice's procedure in a way that speaks Ambient's own language, and keeps the incident within the boundaries of the fictional. She says that the interdiction is perfect 'from her [Beatrice's] point of view'. '"Damn her point of view!" cried the author of Beltraffio' (p.324). The expositive chosen by the narrator is expressive of the transumption that has taken place. This function becomes clearer when the expositive is paradigmatically contrasted with others. To use 'cried' instead of 'said' or 'objected', for instance, and to choose the 'author of Beltraffio' instead of

the 'father' or 'Mark Ambient', are as methodical as the rhyme between 'view' and 'Beltraffio'. Furthermore, the reply itself - 'damn her point of view', instead of 'what about my point of view', is also impregnated with pejorative projection.

The incident signifies that Ambient is no Master at all, for he behaves in a reflex way, and in the manner of the of the 'real' and the unheroic, not the heroic, the masterly or the superhuman. This subversion of the great novelist's position is a sign of the completion of the anxiety of influence. The elder is behaving like the younger, and the latter is ironizing like a master who remembers immaturity, and dissociates himself from it. The precursor's crack betrays a credibility gap between being and doing, which is central to 'The Lesson of the Master'. For example, what about Ambient's attempts to refine the mundane, and to sublimate the superficial? He himself, the incident suggests, is, like Emperor Jones, still primitive from within. Hence it can be said that reversal (metalepsis) is accomplished. Little wonder Mark Ambient is, from the beginning, nothing but the object of observation for the young narrator - and observation is a sign of superiority. The great novelist is made show of like a character, whereas the acolyte is registering, commenting, and performing like an author, the author, that is, of 'The Author of Beltraffio'. Clearly, polyphony, the representation of the characters as author-thinkers, is the narrative mode, and the anxiety of influence is the theme. Hence the focus on the narrator's authorial performance.



At the beginning of the tale, the narrator, like his counterpart in The Aspern Papers, describes his performance as a sort of gaming: 'the little game of new sensations that I was playing with my ingenuous mind' (p.303). The central feature of this is the self-conscious complication of the two narratives with a special manipulation of time. It is not clear, for instance, whether the narrative is analeptic, proleptic or achronic (both); whether the acolyte is the ephebe, or the ex-ephebe; and whether the mood (point of view) and the voice (narrator) are the same or different. Moreover, since there are two narratives, it is not clear which is the first (the true story), and which is the second (the cover-up). Problematizing time, to start with, is foregrounded at the very beginning of the text. The narrator, instead of declaring the date of his visit to Mark Ambient, asks the reader to make out a calendar of the incident guided by some data:

It was three years after the publication of that fascinating work which I had read over five times, and which now, with my riper judgement, I admire on the whole as much as ever. This will give you about the date of my first visit (of any duration) to England; for you will not have forgotten the commotion - I may even say the scandal - produced by Mark Ambient's masterpiece (p.303).

The passage starts with an analepsis - 'It was three years' - followed by a prolepsis - 'after the publication'. Then a second analepsis is added - 'which I had read over five times', and is succeeded by another prolepsis - 'and which now ... I admire as much as ever'. The second sentence begins with a prolepsis - 'This will give you', followed by an analepsis

-my first visit'. Then a prolepsis is introduced - 'you will not have forgotten', and is followed by an analepsis - 'the scandal - produced by Mark Ambient's masterpiece'. The passage is rhythmical: if the movement backwards is referred to as '1', the direction forwards as '2' and the incidents are arranged alphabetically, the two sentences will relate to each other like an iambus and a trochee:

A1 B2 C1 D2

A2 B1 C2 D1

The systematic alternation suggests that the arrangement is not arbitrary but self-conscious. Hence the question about the teleology of the discourse. Is it just to manufacture a poetic effect through pattern and precision? Is it to inject the text by dynamism through a pendulous alternation? Or is it not, to use Nicola Bradbury's words, 'a minute narrative tact' for textual sabotage?<sup>12</sup> For the arrangement suggests that time is not an innocent flux in the tale. It is manipulable, spatializable and functional. Its function arises from the fact that the temporal data do not help the reader decode the date of the narrator's first visit to England. On the contrary, they ambiguate it.

Data, as 'The Great Condition' demonstrates, sometimes confuse and mystify. For the more details Mrs. Damerel gives Bertram Braddle, the more perplexed he becomes. He loses his wife-to-be to Henry Chilver, who does not want any information about her history. Bertram Braddle, it can be said, is the



victim of data. In both cases, details, which are supposed to be a realistic device, eliminate the sense of reality. They have this effect because there is a temporal sabotage. The narrator himself foregrounds the relationship between temporal dissymmetry and the deconstruction of the realistic effect. This occurs in reference to Miss Ambient: 'She seemed to look at me across the ages, and the interval of time diminished the realism of the performance' (CT,V,p.321). This deconstructive impact of spatializing time is more effective when the two kinds of temporal discordance, the analeptic and the proleptic, are synthesized into a more complex device.

Genette, in a section entitled 'Toward Achrony', talks about 'analepses on prolepses' and 'prolepses on analepses' (Genette,p.79). They are, as he says, a form of ironization: 'These proleptic analepses and analeptic prolepses are ... complex ... and they somewhat disturb our reassuring ideas about retrospection and anticipation' (Genette,p.83; my emphasis). It is such 'achronies' that distinguish 'The Author of Beltraffio'. The narrator repeatedly uses sentences like, 'This was my own point of view ... when I was twenty-five' (p.303); 'I used to say to myself' (p.304); 'I was not fully aware of it at the time' (p.308); and 'This proves how little I knew as yet of the English people' (p.310). Such a discourse confirms the two main points put forward so far: the tripartite narrative and the deconstructive 'demolishing of realism'.

In the first case, for instance, any articulation can be analysed into three micro-narratives. The sentence, 'This

proves how little I knew as yet of the English people', consists of a story or a germ, a first narrative and a restructured one. The story is about the relationship between the narrator and the English. It is the fabula not given a verbal garb yet. The first narrative is 'I know the English people (very well)', which can be what Genette calls a 'simultaneous narrative' or the 'prior' one. They are rendered in the present and the future respectively. The restructured text is 'I did not know the English people (at all)', and it is what Genette christens as the 'subsequent narrative'. This is the commonest narrative mode, and is always in the past.

Similarly, the narrator, talking about Beltraffio says, 'there had not as yet been, among English novels such an example of beauty of execution and value of subject. Nothing had been done in that line from the point of view of art for art'. Then he adds, 'This was my own point of view, I may mention, when I was twenty-five' (p.303). Does the last modification suggest that the his point of view is an act of precocity, or an error of judgement? And does it signify that the narrator has changed his attitude? He does not want to be specific about it: 'whether it is altered now, I won't take upon myself - especially as the discerning reader will be able to judge for himself' (p.304). Instead of committing himself, he commissions the reader to investigate (this is the second time he calls on the reader to turn producer). The method which may help the reader find out the answer is to concentrate on the tripartite composition of the statement. First, there is the story which consists of the narrator's reception of



Ambient's novel. The story here is only about the reception without any reference to its quality. Then, there is the first narrative which states that Ambient's work is a masterpiece, and enumerates the qualities that justify its success. Finally, there is the revisionist narrative, the one implied in 'when I was twenty-five'. It is a critique of the first one and a reversal of the earlier judgement: Beltraffio is a failure.

These short statements comprise one analepsis and one prolepsis, or a single achrony. There is the retrospective reflection, which takes the narrative back in time to the point of the enunciation of the first narrative (prior or simultaneous) in the past. In the last example, the reach of analepsis ranges to the stage when the narrator was twenty-five. Sometimes no definite date is mentioned, in which case analepsis is just a flashback (as in 'I used to', for instance). But having arrived at the required temporal destination, the narrator (both voice and mood) envisages the 'previous future', and introduces a prolepsis. In short, it is a going back followed by a coming forward, or an analeptic prolepsis. Sometimes, this achrony and its counterpart are juxtaposed in the tale to produce passages so complicated that Genette, who keeps referring to James, would undoubtedly have liked to quote. For example:

In looking back upon these first moments of my visit to him, I find it important to avoid the error of appearing to have understood his situation from the first, and to have seen in him the signs of things which I learnt only afterwards. This later knowledge throws a backward light, and makes me forget that at least on the occasion of which I am speaking now (I

mean that first afternoon), Mark Ambient struck me as a fortunate man. Allowing for this, I think he was rather silent and irresponsible as we walked back to the house - though I remember very well the answer he made to a remark of mine in relation to his child (p.316).

The complexity takes the whole thing back to square one and confirms that the narrator's guerrilla technique - jumping between the antipodes of time all the time - is meant to achieve, among other things, two dialogic objectives: being both the medium and the mask of the anxiety of influence.

The first function is so important because it puts James, Genette and Bloom into perspective. James is the text. Genette is the structuralist. And Bloom is the hermeneutist. In fact what I have been doing so far is trying to combine Genette's naked structuralism with Bloom's hermeneutics by attaching functions to formulas, perspectives to patterns, and stories to structures. However, the use of temporal sabotage as a medium can be substantiated by Genette's description of his achronies. These are a 'contrast, via the past, between anticipated present and real present', and an exemplification of how 'the present superimposes itself on the previous future whose place it has taken: a retrospective refutation of a mistaken anticipation' (Genette, p.81). The present is the new master, or the ex-ephebe. The 'previous future' is the ephebe. What the narrator of 'Beltraffio' is doing is superimposing the present on the previous future, while recollecting and processing the latter, exactly as he is imposing himself on what he has been, while mystifying his early stage. Of course, this would not



have been possible had it not been for the fact that 'The Author of Beltraffio' is, by definition, a belated narrative, that is, an extended achrony (Notebooks, p.58).

Hence the other function: the use of 'achronies' as a mask to camouflage the narrative of the anxiety of influence. As has already been suggested, the narrator always reverses the reality of the situation by representing it in the form of what it is not. This shuffling structures the two narratives dealing with Dolcino and the Beatrice. The narrator craftily puts these two stories in the perspective of the family structure. He preserves the same constants, while weaving different text and context for them. The child is there, the narrator tells us, because he happens to be 'the apple of discord', not a rival. Beatrice is in the text because she is Ambient's antagonist, not a proto-ephebe. And to ratify his presentation, he piles scene upon scene and data upon data to make believe that the issue is the husband-wife conflict over their child.

Most of the tale, as it stands, is a second narrative or a cover-up, and all the details, the dialogues and the information are redundant, in the sense of being a mere facade. What matters is the true story which is buried alive in the second narrative. After all, it is not what the text says that matters so much as what it does not say. However, it is possible to read the hidden text in the physiognomy of the external one. Such a method is dialogically feasible because the veil that covers the face is itself shaped by that face. Bakhtin confirms that everything is both itself and something

else. It is also, though slightly different, what Macherey means when he says, 'in its every particle, the work manifests, uncovers what it cannot say'. He also suggests that what the text makes 'implicit' 'implicates' the text itself.<sup>13</sup>

### Changing Places with the Changeling:

#### The Narrator and Dolcino

The narrative supposedly about Dolcino, as 'the apple of discord', and the centre of the conflict between husband and wife, confirms that the parents' involvement is a make-believe and that the mystery of what happens should be attributed to the narrator. The text is strewn with signs of a special narrative - sometimes unspoken, and sometimes crying for recognition - between the narrator and Dolcino. It is the inter-ephebal rivalry rehearsed in the form of projection and substitution, which culminate in the death of the literal son, and coronation of the literary one.

The first manifestation of the specific relationship between the narrator and Dolcino is signified by the child's smiles and looks of recognition whenever he comes across the narrator. For example, when they are together after the child's first deterioration, the narrator says, 'I caught, on his enchanting little countenance, a smile of recognition, and for the moment would have been quite content with it' (p.340). This medium of interaction between the two becomes more intense later on, for it remains within the boundaries of the unspoken but audible and visible, as happens on the second occasion.



Dolcino is with his mother. The narrator, who has the freedom to be anywhere in the house, chooses to stay, attached to Dolcino's eyes:

I found myself looking perpetually at Dolcino, and Dolcino looked back at me, and that was enough to detain me. When he looked at me he smiled, and I felt it was an absolute impossibility to abandon a child who was smiling at one like that. His eyes never wandered; they attached themselves to mine, as if among all the small incipient things of his nature there was a desire to say something to me. If I could have taken him upon my own knee he would have perhaps managed to say it; but it would have been far too delicate a matter to ask his mother to give him up ... (p.341-2; the function of exchanged looks will be discussed later on).

The unspoken above becomes audible on another occasion. Ellipsis is filled in and the two 'sons' communicate audibly. It is significant, this time, that the topic is Ambient's writing, and that it is Dolcino, who hosts the argument. He is fascinated by his father's works to the extent that he sounds like an ephebe. It is the only occasion on which Dolcino reveals the possibility of a transformation from a literal son into a literary ephebe - becoming like Lancelot in 'The Tree of Knowledge'. He demonstrates this potential by quizzing everybody about his father's works to find out whether the others are similarly fascinated. (This performance resembles, on a minor scale, the way the narrator relates himself to Mrs. Ambient. He persecutes her with the same kind of interrogation.)

However, after asking his mother, Dolcino addresses the narrator: 'Won't you read them [Ambient's books] to me, American gentleman?' (p.344). To do that is to suggest that Ambient is still the Master, which he is not. Hence, the narrator, who has already accompanied the letter of introduction with a note of his own, superimposes himself as both the reader and the one to be read: 'I would rather tell you some stories of my own ... I know some that are very interesting'. These two incidents, the narrator wishing to take Dolcino from Beatrice, and preferring to tell him his own stories, suggest that he has already stepped into the Master's position - both as father and precursor. It is a sign of the transumption, which is further signified by the freedom the narrator enjoys at the new place: 'I was free, I supposed, to go into the house and write letters, to sit in the drawing-room, to repair to my own apartment and take a nap' (p.341). The acquired 'freedom' at the lion's den is manifested in most of the tales ('The Death of the Lion', 'The Great Good Place' and 'The Real Right Thing', for instance).

The second indication of the narrative between the narrator and Dolcino is the difference between Dolcino's function in the story, and his role in the narrative: the 'frequency' of his appearance in the text, the duration of his presence, and the enunciation or occasion of each scene. Dolcino's role is determined by his function. And since he is there only to die, the frequency of his showing in the story is singular (1S). But he figures more than twelve times in more than twelve long scenes in the narrative (12N). Genette would



stop at this point and satisfy himself by the formula 1S/12N (once in the story, twelve times in the narrative). But the difference between the two sides of the structure calls for a hermeneutic explanation. Why does the narrator give the stage to Dolcino so repeatedly when one scene is enough?

The answer had better be inferred from the context the narrator gives these moments. All the instances are death-bound. Dolcino, as the narrator reiterates in every scene, is a creature born to die. The first incident that enunciates this narrative occurs six pages after the beginning of the tale. If the tale were really about the conflict between husband and wife, 'the apple of discord' would not have such a belated appearance. This overdue debut occurs after the narrator has humanized the Master, which suggests that the narrator is taking the Ambients one at a time. However, the important characteristic of this enunciation is the way the narrator relates himself to it - turning it into a code to be deciphered. The father says, 'Ah, there she is .... and she has got the boy'. The narrator annotates the incident: 'He [Ambient] made his remark in a tone slightly different from any in which he yet had spoken' (p.308). Had the narrator stopped at this point, there would be only one story and one narrative (both significantly analeptic).

But he annotates his own annotation, significantly with a prolepsis. This imposes a second narrative upon the first: 'I was not fully aware of it at the time, but it lingered in my

ear and I afterwards understood it' (my emphasis). Such a belated 'understanding' signifies that what follows is not going to be the first narrative anymore. If the first annotation is the simultaneous narrative, the second is the subsequent restructuring, or the fiction after the fact. Every scene the narrator reproduces, and every incident he narrates will be 'angled' and put into the perspective of that understanding. These inferences explain the narrator's mode of substantiation. He always concretizes his belated reflection with the material that the reader can have no access to, and cannot eventually argue - a device that establishes the narrator as the only source of information. In fact it is not information so much as interpretation, or a substitute text out of which the reader must unearth the first narrative.

The dialogue that follows delineates the territory of signification, and gives the transaction the structure of the anxiety of influence. The narrator asks Ambient, 'Is it your son'? The Master replies, 'Yes, my only child' (p.308). The significance of this short dialogue, which is clearly exclusive of the narrator, arises from the reference to Dolcino as 'it', addressing the question to the father not to the mother, and the anxiety it has generated. Bloom, writing about Milton, says, 'Paradise Lost rather alarmingly begins true time with God's proclamation that Christ is his only begotten son, an announcement that shocks Satan into rebellion'.<sup>14</sup> The narrator rebels and tries to discredit the child's legitimacy by representing him as a 'changeling'. First, he subverts



Ambient's statement with a sub-textual pseudo-substantiation, and tries to undercut it with a shift of interest - from 'what' to 'how', and from denotation to discourse.

It came back to me afterwards, too - the manner in which he spoke these words. They were not petulant; they expressed rather a sudden coldness, a kind of mechanical submission (p.308; my emphasis).

Any comparison between the father's articulation and the narrator's comment reveals the dichotomy between the two. The phrase 'my only child' bespeaks warmth and attachment. The possessive 'my', and the definitive 'only', express the opposite of the narrator's reading. Perhaps the mechanical fatherhood he attributes to Ambient is simply a projection, and the coldness that he feels is due to the temporal gaps between the 'simultaneous', the 'subsequent' and the 'revisionist'. Better still, the gaps may be a pure device to cleave the cord between father and son. The intensity of such an intention may also be the result of the child's performance, which is similar in effect to the father's statement.

Dolcino, like most of James's ephesbes, turns his back on the mother, and attaches himself to the father. He petitions his mother saying, 'Can't I go with papa?' (p.311). This question echoes the narrator's quest for a precursor. And since it is the same figure that the two are after, rivalry becomes the medium of transaction between them. Later on, it will be seen how the narrator indirectly tries to subvert Ambient's fatherhood to Dolcino by representing the child as a

'foundling' or a 'changeling'. But before that, it is worth looking at the entangled composition the narrator weaves to beautify, and justify, the child's removal.

The composition can be given the title of death. The narrator says, 'I had lost no time in observing that the child ... was extraordinarily beautiful ... There was something touching, almost alarming, in his beauty, which seemed to be composed of elements too fine and pure for the breath of this world' (p.309). Relating death to beauty in this manner is not simply a disguise, a justification or even an aesthetic expression of the grotesque. 'Beauty as the mother of death' is a perverted perspective - the narrator himself sometimes describes his performance as 'perverse' - that will crystallize more the moment it is compared with Wallace Stevens' 'Death is the mother of beauty'. Stevens' epiphany is a choice of life, and a predilection for the real, whereas the narrator's is a perspective of termination, a rhetoric of the unreal, and a form of the danse macabre he is staging in the tale. Stevens recalls a similar epiphany in The Magic Mountain, where life and death are positively spatialized together, go on side by side, and give meaning to each other. But here, the narrator's negation is exclusive of the other.

Hence the narrator expresses himself in a way that not only foregrounds the plausibility, and the beauty, of Dolcino's death, but also liquidates the parents. After stating that the child is 'composed of elements too fine and pure for the breath of this world', he spells out his sentiment towards Dolcino:



it is 'as if he had been an orphan, or a changeling, or stamped with some social stigma' (p.310). The shift from death to orphanage and scandal is not a lease of life for 'the poor little devil'; neither is it an expression of pity as much as a submerging of the narrator's real feelings. For describing Dolcino as an 'orphan' or an illegitimate child, while apparently expressing pity, smacks of utmost rivalry and anxiety, and undermines the position of the whole family.

The narrator is the real son. Dolcino, the narrator says, is only a 'changeling', which means that he is not his father's child. Ambient will be the narrator's parent after the acolyte 'changes' places with the 'changeling'. This has already been anticipated by the mutual looks between Dolcino and the narrator. Looks, as Paul Coates explains, signify 'substitution and projection'. Writing about James with a special reference to The Turn of the Screw, he says, 'The exchange of looks is like the exchange of places'. Then he adds that the 'unnamed status' - the narrator is anonymous - makes it possible for one 'to migrate into the place of the other'.<sup>15</sup>

This puts into perspective the 'salvation' the narrator suggests under the disguise of worrying about Dolcino. He says to Mark Ambient, 'You had better give him to me to keep for you ... let me remove the apple of discord' (p.317). The verb 'keep' is given a different signification when it is paralleled with 'remove'. The sublimative description of the child's situation even before death substantiates the point:

The child was rather white, but the main difference I saw in him was that he was even more beautiful than the day before. He had been dressed in his festal garments - a velvet suit and a crimson sash - and he looked like a little invalid prince, too young to know condescension, and smiling familiarly on his subjects (p.340).

The poetics of death frames the passage. Language sounds solemn, and all the paraphernalia are royal as if death were a coronation ceremony. The narrator, while praising Dolcino, is actually hailing himself, for he is going to step into his place. The word 'prince', in addition to its denotation, symbolizes both 'hero' and 'conjunction' (see Olderr). By replacing Dolcino, the narrator ascends the throne, and transforms the husband-wife conjunction into a disjunction. In other words, he is the crown-prince, the real hero, and the only son - fully entitled to be the new master.

This overall reading of the inter-ephebal narrative enveloping Dolcino and the narrator has been called for by the ellipsis at the end of the child's story, which is artfully positioned at the end of the tale so that it may be submerged into it, and the omission itself may be justified at the level of fact. Up to that point, the narrator has been overloading the tale with information about the child, but it is all paranthetical, in the sense of being digressive and intentionally irrelevant. This is why, after the death of the younger ephebe, Miss Ambient tries to change the direction of the second narrative by implicating the narrator. She creates an occasion for him to replace his involuted discourse with the



primary story. He recognizes the necessity, but instead of responding to its logic of the moment, he sidesteps the issue and transforms it into an ellipsis. (This recalls the other incident when she questions him about his career. He registers all the questions but gives no answer). In effect, he deprives the tale of the kind of conclusion it is calling for:

I dropped upon the nearest bench, overcome with wonder and agitation: quite as much at Miss Ambient's terrible lucidity as at the charge she made against her sister-in-law. There was an amazing coherency in her story, and it was dreadful to me to see myself figuring in it as so proximate a cause. "You are a very strange woman and you say very strange things" (p.354).

He is trying to undermine Miss Ambient's injection - that he is the cause of Dolcino's death - by misreading the message encoded in her discourse. He interprets it as a reference to Beatrice not to himself. Then he undercuts the implicating perlocution by foregrounding the technical aspect, 'amazing coherency'. Moreover, he tries to polish his game with the delicacy of impersonality - the implicit indictment of the statement does not blind him to its artistic specificity. It is one of his characteristics to eviscerate the text by introducing an aesthetic focus. What counts for him is not death as such but its beauty and poetics. Similarly, the story about his horrible career is irrelevant. What matters is the formalism of that story. In short, it is not how oracular what the oracle says may be but how oratorical, which recalls the first-person narrator in The Aspern Papers.

However, the two devices fail to submerge the oracle-function 'of Miss Ambient - 'strange woman' saying 'strange things', for this double negative signifies something positive. The narrator's failure is stylistically, and scenically, registered. He figures, in the passage above, as the object both in the surface structure and the deep structure. The verbs he uses, 'dropped' and 'overcome' reflect the impact of the oracular truth upon him. It makes him, for the first time in the narrative, 'see myself'. Consequently, he has to acknowledge the possibility of his being the cause of death, which he does. But instead of addressing himself comprehensively to it, he renders it almost elliptically. It takes only seventeen words. Its duration, frequency and elliptical quality are supposed to be techniques of trivialization, but as has been demonstrated, they are signs of significance: signs that betray the second narrative, and undermine its mystification of the narrator's approach to the Ambients. But if the reader plays Miss Ambient, that is, be inside and outside the tale at the same time, he/she will come to the same judgement Miss Ambient has come to: the narrator has terminated Dolcino. Talking about this issue, Muriel Shine, in The Fictional Children of Henry James, says, 'The inescapable fact is that his[the narrator's] action leads directly to the tragic death of the little boy...'.<sup>16</sup>



## From the Boudoir to the Library:

## Converting the Master's Wife

Dolcino's story puts into perspective, and lends meaning to, the mother's story. There are two narratives involving Beatrice. The first is the conflict between the narrator and herself. He wants to transform her into an ephebe so that he will achieve what the Master himself has failed to do. Mark Ambient, has acolytes and worshippers all over the place except, ironically, at home. In other words, Ambient's performance is good but not good enough, for he has not gone all the way. It is the ephebe, who will carry out what Bloom calls 'completion': continuing where the precursor has stopped, and fulfilling what the earlier has been unable to address. If such a procedure succeeds, it will establish the acolyte as the new master and will make Beatrice his own ephebe not Ambient's.

That is the first narrative, or what might be called the story of the story. The second, which is just a falsification and a mystification, is what the narrator represents as the primary narrative that has taken place during his stay with the Ambients. It is supposedly the family drama he has 'objectively' observed and registered. The point is that he wants to represent himself not as a character in that narrative, but a camera-eye. Edel and other critics take this version seriously, and try to canonize it as the conflict by mythicizing it into the Medea-story, the terrible mother, and so on. Muriel Shine quite rightly questions this critique of the tale: 'At first glance, an objective and an unwilling

witness to the terrible events of that weekend, 'it soon becomes evident that the narrator is not as uninvolved as he believes himself to be'.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the surface story, when properly put into perspective, will turn out to be a stratagem the function of which is curtailing the anxiety, ironizing the precursor, and establishing the ephebe as the 'lord and master', as the narrative of henpecking demonstrates.

This occurs after a succession of scenes between Mark Ambient and his wife. They start with the comedy about who is to have the child. The logic of the scenes makes the narrator expect a build-up to a great fight, but the Ambients disappoint his horizon of expectations. Ambient himself, instead of putting Beatrice in a straitjacket, or committing her to the attic, approaches her with the tenderest terms of endearment. The contrast between what seems to the narrator dismissive (Beatrice) and servile (Mark) prompts him to say, 'The quickness of transition [from loathing to love] made me vaguely ask myself whether he were henpecked - a shocking conjecture, which I instantly dismissed' (p.309). But he has not, for it is still on record in the text. It is a practice that the deconstructionists favour - writing something and erasing it in a way that leaves it both dismissed and highlighted. This henpecking-anecdote is not anomalous, for it surfaces in the other tales so systematically that it becomes a pattern in the way ephebes humanize their precursors, and camouflage their own anxiety of influence.



In 'The Lesson of the Master', for instance, Paul Overt registers the anecdote about Mrs. St. George making her husband burn one of his books. Similarly, the narrator in 'The Death of the Lion' underlines the negative role Mrs. Wimbush plays in the Master's life. The narrator believes that Mrs. Wimbush turns London into an ambush for Paraday: 'She played her victims against each other with admirable ingenuity, and her establishment was a huge machine in which the tiniest and the biggest wheels went round to the same treadle' (CT, IX, p. 105). This narrator emphasizes his animosity towards women, and thinks of them as victimizers of great artists. Indeed, he tends to think of Paraday as a martyr: 'I am afraid I shall have presented him as martyr in a very small cause if I fail to explain that he surrendered himself much more liberally than I surrendered him' (CT, IX, p. 106). And in 'The Tree of Knowledge', the first-person narrator repeatedly foregrounds the 'fact' that George Mallow, who is known as the Master, is 'remote-controlled' by his wife. She sustains the illusion of mastery for him, and is consequently capable of undoing him the moment she decides to terminate the make-believe.

Such a narrative has multiple functions, otherwise it would not be the common denominator in most of the influence tales. Ephebes use it as a device for ironizing their precursors. The latter will not be lions once portrayed in this manner: they will be emasculated. It will also justify the ephebe's repressing the precursor, and seeking solitude away from him. Furthermore, portraying the Master as being overpowered by a woman, is ominous as far as the trajectory of

the anxiety of influence is concerned. It anticipates the outcome of the conflict. If the master is henpecked, and his role is merely decorative, he will not be functional at the literary institution, and will never win at the cockfight between himself and the ephebe. This may explain why henpecking is foregrounded, whereas cockfighting is relegated. It looks as if the narrator turns his back on the Master as the lion turns its back on Don Quixote. Moreover, by concentrating on henpecking, the acolyte-narrator gives the illusion that the real problem is not the anxiety of influence, for he cannot be under the influence of such a browbeaten preceptor. His role is merely an objective, impersonal narration. But this is not the case as Beatrice's story demonstrates.

The narrator tries to make her believe that she is an ephebe. But she keeps reiterating to him that she is a wife. At the end of part one, she highlights the core of the conflict: 'I daresay you attribute to me ideas that I haven't got', which recalls what Julia says to Nick. (p.327). It is these 'ideas', the way they are 'attributed' to Beatrice, and their bearing on the tale as a whole, that unravel the primary narrative. The narrator, as already argued, is an ex-ephebe, who has experienced the ordeal of belatedness, and suffered the complexities of being an acolyte. It is this persona that he is pejoratively projecting upon Beatrice. Hence no matter how hard she tries to distance herself from art, and to disengage herself from the literary life of her husband, the narrator tries to drag her out of the boudoir into the library, and to push her out of the role of the wife into that of the ephebe.



Placing her in that position will indirectly exonerate him from belatedness, and will establish his superiority over the Master, ironically, the husband.

The first step he takes is to sound out the possibility that Ambient has a multiplicity of acolytes. But he articulates himself in a way that represents Beatrice as one of them. He says that Ambient 'must have a very happy life, then. He has many worshippers' (p.312). Relating the husband's 'happy life' to the number of followers suggests that the wife is also on her knees at the temple. Beatrice responds to this inclusive tone with an exclusive rejoinder: 'Oh, yes, I have seen them'. The importance of this exchange arises from the conclusion the narrator gets from it: 'I guessed very quickly that she was not in sympathy with the author of Beltraffio'. This signifies two things. The narrator is trying to give the impression that his approach is not enforced upon the text. His understanding is 'embedded' in what the other says. Secondly, by calling Beatrice 'unsympathetic', he is setting himself the task of converting her to the Master's cult. (The reader, however, knows that the inference above is a misreading, for Beatrice keeps calling Ambient 'clever'.)

Feeling that the narrator is besieging her, Beatrice changes the topic from influence to 'gardening', but to no avail. No matter what the dialogue is about, the narrator makes sure to bring Ambient into play one way or another. He is aware of this predilection in his performance. As he says, he feels 'irresistibly impelled ... to bring the conversation constantly

back to him [Ambient]' (p.314). The dialectic between the two, inside and outside, familial and literary, is a pattern that applies to all the exchanges between the narrator and Beatrice. Hence he replaces the context of gardening, which she has managed to 'skulk', by another context much more inclusive. She may not be able to step out of it this time: 'Your house is like one of his pictures'. She replies, 'I don't in the least consider that I am living in one of his books ... I am afraid I am not very literary ... And I am not artistic'. Her tone becomes militant, as a sign of her desire to be seen as a wife not an ephebe: 'whatever I am, I am very different from my husband. If you like him you won't like me. You needn't say anything. Your liking me isn't in the least necessary' (p.314).

Her rejoinder is supposed to terminate the possibility of any literary linkage between husband and wife, and consequently wife and narrator. But the latter is too 'pushy' to give up. He says, 'I came back, irrepressibly, to Mark Ambient', and 'I proceeded from point to point, in this malign inquiry, simply because my hostess, who probably thought me a very pushing and talkative young man, gave me time'. He wants to know what kind of bearing London has on Ambient's productivity. Once again, Beatrice distances herself from her husband's career. It is the same resistance she has been putting up so far: 'I am afraid you think I know a great deal more about my husband's work than I do. I haven't the least idea what he is doing' (p.315). The more she disengages herself, the more determined the narrator



becomes. Like the narrator of The Aspern Papers, he is so possessed with his anxiety that he heeds no logic, or context, as is evident at the end of the first part.

On this occasion, Dolcino is reported unwell, the scene is intense, and the nature of the moment dictates delicacy. But the narrator, who moralizes all the time, sidesteps the ethics of the situation, and surprises Beatrice by enforcing the same topic upon her: 'I alluded to the precious proof-sheets with which Ambient had entrusted me ... "It is the opening chapters of his new book ... fancy the satisfaction at being allowed to carry them to my room!"'. She, as already quoted, rounds off the first part with what seems to be the core of her story with the narrator: 'I daresay you attribute to me ideas that I haven't got. I don't take that sort of interest in my husband's proof-sheets' (p.327).

All the exchanges quoted above come significantly from the first half of the tale. They are, as their repeated content demonstrates, about the anxiety of influence. The topic is the Master - his work, life, and artistic performance. Furthermore, they are presented by a new master and addressed to a proto-ephebe. The narrator hints at these co-ordinates when he says, 'There was even in her manner an intimation that I was rather young, and that people usually got over that sort of thing' (p.313). His own intimation, of course, is ironic. Beatrice herself, he seems to be insinuating, is the young one. The introduction of youth here, as at the beginning of the tale, confirms that the work is about influence. But the

artistic discourse, the influence problematic, and the worship of the Master, suddenly come to an end at the end of the first part. The aesthetic is replaced by the ethical, and cockfighting by henpecking. It is this composition of the tale into two parts, like that of The Golden Bowl, which puts the two narratives into perspective.

The first part of 'The Author of Beltraffio', is the first narrative, whereas Part Two is the second narrative. The first is the 'true' text, whereas the second is the falsification. The difference between the two is that between reflex and reflection, or the 'simultaneous' and the 'subsequent'. More importantly, it is the distinction between the 'ephebal' and the 'ex-ephebal'. The retrospective perspectivism, which dominates the second half of the tale, entails the processing of the anxiety of influence into the husband-wife conflict, and the substitution of the ethical framework for the artistic discourse so that the narrator, who is pulling all the threads, will figure as the conscience of the tale not its con-man. Viola Hopkins Winner says, 'The critical challenge of "The Author of Beltraffio" is to clarify the ambiguous relation of the aesthetic ideas to the moral and the psychological aspects of the story'<sup>18</sup>. The ethical is a challenge only in the sense of the analysis it requires to betray what it camouflages.

The change, however, is signified by the major moral note played by the narrator and Miss Ambient. These two explicate the causes of the dichotomy between Ambient and Beatrice and come out with the conclusion that the schism is to be squarely



blamed on the wife's 'being so religious and so tremendously moral' (p.329). The restructuring or 'angling' is further reflected in the incidents the narrator chooses to register. For example, he begins to narrate Beatrice's religious activities: 'Her husband mentioned ... that she was hoping to go church. I afterwards learnt that she did go, but I may as well announce without delay that he and I did not accompany her' (p.329). In fact, he manages to direct the second half in a way that makes the moral context completely camouflage the artistic discourse of the first part. The Master, for example, is quoted as saying, 'The difference between us is simply the opposition between two distinct ways of looking at the world ... my wife would tell you it's the difference between Christian and Pagan' (p.334). The ethical manoeuvre reaches its utmost, as expected, in attributing the cause of the child's death to the mother. Miss Ambient tells the narrator that 'It's too late to save him. His mother has let him die' (p.353). But the new perspective will lack credibility if the narrator himself does not sound pious. Hence he injects the narrative with the tone, as when he tries to justify giving the proof-sheets to Beatrice: 'I was obliged to tell him that I was at the bottom of the mystery. I had had it on my conscience to assure her of what her husband was capable' (p.347).

But underneath this moral discourse, the narrator keeps at his project for transforming the mother into an ephebe. He never loses sight of the first narrative. The clearest example is the scene in which she takes the proof-sheets. He does not absent himself from the room. On the contrary, he plants

himself there because what happens represents for him the success of his enterprise; and the fulfilling of what the master has failed to do. The scene represents the metamorphosis of the wife into a novice ephebe. Indeed, the narrator thinks of the incident as an objective correlative of his triumph:

Mrs Ambient, having pushed open the door in the same noiseless way that marked - or disguised - her entrance the night before, had advanced across the threshold. On seeing me she stopped ... she came straight to her husband's writing-table, as if she were looking for something. I got up and asked her if I could help her...

"Is this the new book?" she asked, holding it up.

"The very sheets, with precious annotations."

"I mean to take your advice." And she tucked the little bundle under her arm (p.346).

The scene is a dramatization of the change. Mrs Ambient, though in her house, behaves stealthily like a young ephebe ashamed of belatedness. The narrator, waits for her, significantly in her husband's study, like a Mephistopheles ambushing a youthful spirit. He lures her, saying, 'The very sheets, with precious annotations'. This represents his success: 'I congratulated her cordially, and ventured to make of my triumph, as I presumed to call it, a subject of pleasantries'. He has every reason to call it that: Dolcino is dead; Ambient has already been humanized; and Miss Ambient retires to a 'Sisterhood'. And as for the conversion of Mrs. Ambient, 'I ought to mention that the death of her child in some degree converted her. When the new book came out ... she read it as a whole, and ... during those few supreme weeks [of



her slow death] she even dipped into Beltraffio'. 'And, a propos of consciences, the reader is now in a position to judge' (p.355). Conversion, a form of the anxiety of influence, confirms the existence of a first narrative. Moreover, addressing the reader, at this stage, emphasizes that the narrator is self-conscious about authorship. Yet he keeps trying, though at the last minute, to ambiguate his story with the second narrative of the ethical (consciences). He still wants to make believe that he has converted nobody, and 'influenced' no head, as if the conversion that has taken place were simply the dead daemonizing the dead.

## II. St. George and Henry St. George:

The New Master and the Old Dragon

in 'The Lesson of the Master'

'My dear fellow, on what basis are we talking?'  
(CT,VII,264)?

Like 'The Author of Beltraffio', 'The Lesson of the Master', which is written immediately before The Tragic Muse, is structured upon the polarity between an ephebe and his precursor. The first, Paul Overt, is introduced as 'a student of fine prose', whereas the second, Henry St. George, is described as 'a high literary figure' (p.214). These definitions set the scene for the anxiety of influence, and chart the trajectories of the careers for both characters. St. George, being 'high' - which foregrounds 'low' - faces the possibility of demise. By contrast, the 'student' is expected

to 'imitate', 'emulate', and supersede his preceptor (see William James in the Introduction). The importance of these changes is that they are metaleptic exchanges, in the sense that the forebear and the acolyte will become, as will be demonstrated, each other.

The theme of the anxiety of influence is central to the tale. The title musters the two personae of the conflict; and the text focuses their juxtaposition by representing them as belonging to the same genre: they are a great novelist and a novice one. In fact, the narrator consistently refers to Overt as the 'young man' or the 'disciple', which confirms his ephebal position. Moreover, for the narrator endows Overt with the credentials which distinguish the ephebe as such. For example, like the narrator of 'Beltraffio', Overt has the limitations of youth, such as 'nervousness' and 'irritability': 'The young man was slightly nervous; that belonged in general to his disposition as a student of fine prose with his dose of the artist's restlessness' (p.214). More importantly, Overt is characterized as having that militant, grenadier-like constitution for which Miriam Rooth is well-known. The narrator says, 'he [Overt] had guessed that his initiator [General Fancourt] was a military man, and such was the turn of Overt's imagination' (pp.215-6).

Titles become more focused when St. George and Overt get together, for they relate to each other like a parent and a son. The quest for a parent, something rehearsed in The Tragic Muse and 'Beltraffio', is the primal scene in 'The Lesson of



the Master', as one dialogue between Overt and Marian reveals. This occurs towards the end of Part Two, just before the master's debut. Marian is telling Overt some anecdotes that may de-mythologize St. George. But Paul emphasizes that his feeling towards St. George is above judgements and criticism. Hence he thinks of the approaching first meeting as 'a great event for me' (p.229). Then, unexpectedly, he narrates an episode that might be described as the last meeting, and might be labelled as a great event too. It is the death of his mother that took place one year ago. Overt is not only an orphan seeking a mentor, but he is trying to substitute one parent, significantly a mother, with another parent, understandably a father. (Most of James's ephebes do the same: Hugh replaces the Countess with Dencombe ('The Middle Years'); Leolin, Mrs. Stormer with the male narrator ('Greville Fane'); Nick Dormer, Lady Agnes with Nash, and so on).

The importance of such a quest arises from the fact that an ephebe cannot become a master without going through a precursor. If he has no predecessor, as James and Bloom say, the acolyte has to invent one, and to father himself on him. No wonder Nick Dormer wants to paint Gabriel Nash. Otherwise, he points out, people will say that Nick has invented Nash. This premise is endorsed by a number of scenes in which the kinship between St. George and Overt is like that of the parent-son relationship. For example, when the first congratulates the second on his products, the narrator describes the scene, saying that Overt is 'looking up from his sofa at his erect inquisitor and feeling partly like a happy little boy when the

schoolmaster is gay and partly like some pilgrim of old who might have consulted the oracle' (p.261). The tale does not limit itself to such a polarity of the earlier and the latecomer. On the contrary, it brings into play all the significations that together comprise the repertoire of the anxiety of influence. Towards the end of the tale, for instance, after it becomes clear that St. George will marry Marian, Overt questions the incident, wondering, 'Why to him, why not to youth, to strength, to ambition, to a future? Why, in her rich young capacity, to failure, to abdication, to superannuation' (p.279)?

This statement is central, not only because it focuses the conflict, but because it highlights its specificity. The way Overt describes St. George signifies disillusion and demythologization, which are the crux of 'The Lesson of the Master'. For unlike 'The Author of Beltraffio', the focus here is not on the double narrative or the manipulation of time. It is on the dialectic between legend and reality, the image and the personage, or what the ephebe thinks of the master and what the master himself turns out to be. Hence the mythical subtext of the tale. As will be seen in the latter section of this chapter, the conflict between the ephebe - the saviour of art, and St. George - the mercenary stock-broker-like novelist, is rehearsed as a combat between the saviour and the dragon in 'St. George and the Dragon'.

The tale starts with the legend of the master, which is propagated by both Miss Fancourt and Paul Overt. The latter



describes the Master as being 'distinguished' (p.213), 'illustrious' (p.217); and considers him 'a high literary figure' (p.214). In Part Four, Marian keeps reiterating her conviction that Henry St. George is omniscient: he knows and sees everything. Furthermore, calling the master the 'actuality' and the 'oracle' feeds into the mechanism of legend-making. The legend itself is that Henry St. George is the mythical St. George. But the truthfulness of such a representation hinges on the availability of intrinsic evidence. Hence it remains to ascertain whether the legend itself is true, and whether or not the master himself is up to the horizon of expectations.

Part One has an anti-climactic ending that undermines the mythical status of the great novelist. Here, the ephebe is waiting for the moment of truth, the first meeting with the Master. The latter, after significant 'absence', comes into the scene. The 'irony' is that Paul Overt cannot recognize him. The Master can be anybody else, for he has no specificity to distinguish him. General Fancourt tells Overt that St. George 'is the fellow talking to my girl. By Jove, he is making up to her' (p.221). The reaction that follows is a reversal of the moment of truth into a moment of disillusion. The legend recedes, and the conceptions formed in absentia shrink before the real: '"Ah, is that he really?" The young man felt a certain surprise, for the personage before him contradicted a preconception which had been vague only till it was confronted with the reality.' That preconception bears the brunt of the

affrontation: 'As soon as this happened, the mental image retiring with a sigh, became substantial enough to suffer a slight wrong' (p.221).

The real Master the ephebe has been shaping himself after is not the person living at Summersoft, but the mental image, formed by the latter's oeuvre, and embroidered by the legend itself. The disjunction between the person and the personification generates the dialectic between abstract and the concrete. The thesis is the myth, or the abstraction, but the antithesis is the germ, or the actuality. The synthesis of the dialectic is the deconstruction of of the fable, the demythologization of the precursor, and the birth of the new master. Indeed, the way General Fancourt and Marian talk, at the beginning of Part Two, about Overt's books confirms that there is a new legend in the making. General Fancourt says that Marian knows Overt, though she has not met him before. she reads everything. She says, 'As if I read you because I read everything'. Then she adds, 'I don't read everything - I read very little. But I have read you' (p.223). It may be said, of course, that Marian is ironic. The idea that Overt is not a part of her reading although she has read everything means that he is simply 'nothing'. But the case is different, for the second statement modifies the first and confirms that she has read him, which in effect suggests that Overt is beyond 'everything' she has read. And since she has covered St. George's books, the ultimate inference will be that Overt, the new legend, is already beyond the master.



Indeed, the text bristles with anecdotes that project the demise of precursor, and the rise of the latecomer. In Part Two, for example, Marian and Overt talk about the way the master relates to his own works. Marian agrees that they are 'queer' and adds, 'He told me he didn't esteem them'. Overt expresses the same reaction: 'There was a certain shock for Paul Overt in the knowledge that the fine genius they were talking of had been reduced to so explicit a confession and had made it to the first comer' (p.229). Overt's anxiety is endorsed by St. George's performance. When the latter comes down into the arena, he starts exposing himself. Everything he says subverts the image in the ephebe's mind. Overt asks him whether or not he would like to pass for what Marian portrays him. The great novelist replies, 'Ah, my dear young man, don't talk about passing! I'm passing away - nothing else than that. She has a better use for her young imagination ... than in "representing" in any way such a weary, wasted used-up animal' (p.237)! The idea of being 'used-up' or having run out of literature is repeated when Overt talks about painting Marian. St. George replies, 'Ah, there it is -there is nothing like life! When you are finished, squeezed dry and used-up and you think the sack's empty, you still get touches and thrills ... But I shan't do it - she's not for me!' (p.242).

This resignation arises not only from his impotence, but also from his position in time. In Part Five, for instance, he represents himself as Overt's grandmother, saying, 'You go to see your grandmother on her birthday - and very proper it is, especially as she won't last for ever. She has lost every

faculty and every sense; she neither sees, nor hears, nor speaks; but all customary pieties and habits are respectable' (p.260). The 'grandmother-image' doubles the output of demythologization: it is not only temporal termination, but a metaleptic transvestism, which recalls 'The Death of the Lion'. There, characters talk about Guy Walsingham and her writing, Dora Forbes and his novels. The first, Guy, simulates a male character on the assumption that such an identity may help her with 'the permissibility of the larger latitude'. The second, Dora, 'assumes a feminine personality because the ladies are such popular favourites' (CT,IX,p.89).

This mapping out of the conflict is confirmed by the unfolding of all the phases of the anxiety of influence. The first ratio begins with the representation of Paul Overt as being, like any ephebe, with the primal moment of worshipping the master, or what Bloom calls 'election'. He is thrilled for being in the vicinity of the authority, and asks everybody -the servant and General Fancourt - about St. George. Furthermore, when he observes other characters on the lawn, he feels that 'there was a particular excitement in the idea that Henry St. George might be a member of the party' (p.214). Interestingly, he (mis)takes one of them for the great novelist. But the way he mistakes him for the master is significant, for it is more projective and pejorative than verisimilar. The incident happens as follows. There are three men and one of them might be the precursor. General Fancourt is eliminated because he has already made his acquaintance. Overt concentrates on the other two:



One of the gentlemen was out of the question - he was too young; and the other scarcely looked clever enough, with such mild indiscriminating eyes. If those eyes were St. George's the problem presented by the ill-matched parts of his genius was still more difficult of solution ... Lastly, Paul Overt had an indefinite feeling that if the gentleman with the sightless eyes bore the name that had set his heart beating faster (he also had contradictory conventional, whiskers - the younger admirer of the celebrity had never in a mental vision seen his face in so vulgar a frame), he would have given a sign of recognition (p.216).

This discourse, which recalls the way the narrator of 'The Author of Beltraffio' generalizes away the identity or the difference of Ambient's face, is not simply a mistake. Its duration in the text - nearly a whole page - signifies that it has an important function. It stands for the trope of the first phase, irony, the function of which is the subversion of the master's position, and the consolidation of the acolyte's. The reader can feel the ironic effect of the possibility that there is a master who looks like a monster ('ill-matched parts' and 'sightless eyes'). Furthermore, the anecdote is an exemplification of how the master undermines his own legend. Overt says that the master, prior to the event, has 'set his heart beating', which is one way of registering his disillusionment. However, to ensure that the anxiety will be deterred, Overt turns the predecessor into a sort of phobia that will curtail the anxiety of influence.

It may be said that the anecdote is not as functional as it is being represented here. It is simply a redundant mistaking, for the ephebe immediately realizes that the master

is absent. Such a comment confirms its importance, for 'absence' and 'presence' are the imagery of the first phase of influence (clinamen). In other words, the paraphernalia of the first ratio are all at work at this stage. This 'absence' of the great novelist recalls its analogues in 'The Author of Beltraffio' and The Tragic Muse, which signifies systematic composition in the three works. 'Reaction-formation', the defence-mechanism of this ratio, is also a part of the performance. It expresses Overt's desire not to appear as he really is, and comes into action from the very beginning. The way he communicates with the servant, for example, suggests that he does not want to be transparent or readable to that functionary. The latter offers to show Overt to his room, 'but the young man declined this privilege, having no disorder to repair after so short and easy a journey' (p.213; my emphasis). Soon after this, when he 'perceived that the people under the trees were noticing him he turned back through the open doors' (p.214). He does not want to give them the advantage of seeing him in a state of disorder. 'Reaction-formation' becomes a continuous extemporization about make-believe or the kind of mask to wear. Hence he does not join the party straightaway:

He was but slenderly supplied with a certain social boldness ... so that, conscious of a want of acquaintance with the four persons in the distance, he indulged in a movement as to which he had a certain safety in feeling that it did not necessarily appear to commit him to an attempt to join them (p.215).



Overt's self-misrepresentation confirms that, consciously or not, he wants to distance himself from St. George, which is in effect a transition from swerving to antithetical composition (clinamen to tessera). This is what the narrator underlines while talking about the clash between the the image and the personage: 'For the younger writer he [the master] had remained a high literary figure, in spite of the lower range of production to which he had fallen'. The first impression this articulation gives is that Overt is unaware of the precursor's decline, as if the voice and the mood of focalization here belong to the narrator. But it is not the case for the young novelist is aware of the new situation: 'There had been moments when Paul Overt almost shed tears upon this'. Tears, which suggest the paradox of attachment and discontinuity, explain why the ephebe, who is swerving from the precursor, has not severed the umbilical cord yet: 'he was conscious', as the narrator says, 'only of the fine original source and of his own immense debt' (pp.214-5).

This stage (Tessera) is not about rupture, but transition, which is scenically represented, in most tales, by the handing over of manuscripts. The last work a precursor has is either a manuscript or proof-sheets but not a book. What happens is that instead of keeping it to himself, the predecessor surrenders it to the young artist. St. George shows his draft to Overt, Mark Ambient hands over his proof-sheets to the narrator, and Paraday places his manuscript in the acolyte's

hands. Such documents stand for works unfinished, and suggest that the ephebes will do what the predecessors have failed to accomplish: they will produce books.

But Dencombe, it may be said, is represented as having finished a novel. Is he not portrayed with the book in his hand? Indeed, he is, but the book looks like a disabled manuscript in his hands or rather like a good manuscript in disabled hands. In both cases, the master cannot go all the way. The Middle Years stands only for the first chance, which is just half the project. There is still the second chance to be fulfilled, which engenders transition. It is the ephebe, who will start where the master has stopped, and will achieve what Dencombe has fallen short of. Hugh will circulate the book and pass it over to posterity. This doubles the signification of 'transition' for, in addition to the transfer from earlier to latecomer, it connotes the transformation of The Middle Years, from the unfinished, manuscript-like form to that of the full-fledged marketed book. No wonder Hugh relates to Dencombe in the same way 'The Middle Years' relates to The Middle Years. Hugh, the young ephebe, embraces Dencombe, the old precursor, exactly as the short story contains the novel.

But 'transition' will not be feasible unless anxiety is curtailed. Hence the defence-mechanism of the second phase, 'turning against the self', also surfaces at this stage. The ephebe represents St. George in a way that may mitigate the anxiety or undo it altogether. He defines the master out of the literary establishment so that there will be no reason for him



to think of St. George as the source of influence, or the cause of anxiety anymore. This occurs when he thinks of Mrs. St. George as a woman who 'might be the wife of a gentleman who kept books rather than wrote them, who carried on great affairs in the City and made better bargains than those that poets make with publishers' (p.218).

So far, it is the ephebe, who is marching ahead, whereas the precursor is receding. But the trajectory of the influence interrupts this act of crossing by introducing a moment of humbling the self or self-doubt (kenosis). Here, the young artist empties himself out, and relegates his position to that of the earlier. Paul Overt behaves in this way on a number of occasions, and gives the impression that the great novelist is undefeatable. The first instance occurs when Marian tells him that his own book is 'splendid'. Overt, as already quoted, resigns his splendour, and flies the flag of the master: 'Ah! don't talk of anything I have done, here; there is another man in the house who is the actuality' (pp.226-7)! He adds, 'I'm prostrate before him' (p.229). These seem to suggest that the acolyte is a symbol of 'emptiness' whereas the master stands for 'fullness'. But exactly as doubt slides into certainty, humbling the self turns into humbling the other.

This is why the acolyte gives a different interpretation of his being 'prostrate'. Marian asks him if that position means that 'you think then he's perfect'. He expresses himself clearly, 'Far from it. Some of his later books seem to me awfully queer' (p.229). Such a revisionist swerve puts

'actuality' in a different perspective: the 'actual' versus the 'real'. Indeed, this phase, daemonization, is the most important ratio in the text. Little wonder it has the longest duration. It is manifested in different forms of repressing the earlier and generalizing away his uniqueness on the one hand, and producing a counter-sublime on the other. An early example is about the reputed prolific career of the master: Overt's 'private conviction was that admirably as Henry St. George wrote ... only too much' (p.220).

But its full impact is not felt until Henry St. George joins the rest of the characters. The ephebe meets the master, and confrontation comes into action. This ratio, by definition, entails the 'sinking' of the master's difference, or artistic identity, so that he will be repressed and undone for good. This is what the ephebe embarks on both on the artistic and the extra-artistic levels. He is represented as searching for signifiers of specificity but what he finds is a semblance of stereotyping. The great novelist does not look like an artist at all. He does not have those features that distinguish the man of letters. Overt, who has been - like James - to 'foreign lands', knows that there is a semiotic code that constructs the literary identity. It is that code which is missing in St. George, but the acolyte does not limit his observation to his precursor. He articulates it in the form of what Genette calls the 'iterative' narrative so that all the English novelists will be humanized alike.



Overt attributes the literary opaqueness to the English tradition: 'in England this [artistic] identification was as little as possible a matter of course, thanks to the greater conformity, the habit of sinking the profession instead of advertising it, the general diffusion of the air of the gentleman'<sup>19</sup>. This explanation recalls James's criticism of Trollope. James says that Trollope 'responds in perfection to a certain English ideal. According to that ideal it is rather dangerous to be explicitly and consciously an artist'.<sup>20</sup> Of course, 'sinking' here does not only mean covering, for both James and Paul Overt are playing on the signification of the word. As in 'sinking the vessel', it implies 'drowning' the profession and the para-professionals.

Stereotyping the great novelist into a gentleman, that is, defining him out of the literary establishment, is emphasized by physiological and sociological stereotyping too. The ephebe looks at the master and observes that the latter has 'a regular face, with a fresh colour, a brown moustache, and a pair of eyes surely never visited by a fine frenzy'. These eyes recall the lawn-scene when Overt mistakes the man with the 'sightless eyes' for the master. (Most ephebes concentrate on the precursor's face and eyes, for what they symbolize. According to Olderr, they stand for authority, power, and deity, which recalls Bloom's focus on the eyes, as seen in Chapter Four. It becomes more understandable why the ephebe wants to 'smash' the earlier's face once it is remembered that the 'face' also signifies 'the false mirror'). No wonder the young novelist holds on to his earlier supposition that 'St.

George looked like a lucky stockbroker'. The identification of the novelist with the non-novelist, or seeing no difference between the two, does not arise from the Pateresque roughness of the 'eye' but from the Bloomian toughness of the 'I'. After all, it is 'la guerre'.

In addition, 'daemonization' is manifested in the form of a second narrative that is given a long duration: henpecking. The young novelist is persistent in his attempt to represent it as the primal story. Like the narrator of 'The Author of Beltraffio', Paul Overt tries to boil down St. George's failure to Mrs. St. George: she has made her husband burn one of his books. Overt keeps asking Marian for more data about the husband-wife relationship, and keeps changing most of the topics discussed with St. George to questions about the wife. The first, Marian, is prolific in the details she mentions, which gives the impression that Overt is not a character in the husband-wife narrative. He is simply an 'objective' witness of what he registers. But St. George interdicts Overt from making a topic of Mrs. St. George, as if he felt that Overt wants to transform him from the artist-impeccable into that of the husband-henpeckable. This recalls how the narrator of 'Beltraffio' attributes Mark Ambient's decline to his weaker position in the family power-structure. In both cases, the method undermines the precursor, and humanizes him into a domesticated 'doyen' unqualified for the cockfight.

Overt's premise for taking that line is embedded in St. George's complaining of worshipping 'false gods', and of



having married a muse. This discourse is metaphorical: 'marriage' is the literary career; the 'wife' is the 'muse'; and the 'boys' - his children are all boys - are his 'ephebes'. But Paul Overt 'misreads' that style, and literalizes the Master's language so that 'wife' will mean Mrs. St. George, and 'children' will signify his 'real' boys, who are elliptically mentioned. The ephebe's performance is not without reason. His determination to represent the members of the master's family as the impediments of art is, like that of the narrator of 'The Author of Beltraffio', attributable to the inter-ephebal rivalry. The way he plays this game demonstrates that his performance is not innocent at all. Once, for instance, while the great novelist is talking about the success of his children and taking his utmost pride in it, Overt interrupts him in a manner bubbling with rivalry: 'Then what did you mean - the other night at Summersoft - by saying that children are a curse'? St. George protests, 'My dear fellow on what basis are we talking?' (p.264). To know what that basis is, it is worth quoting the Master's protest in reference to the 'wife': 'I've married for money'. But observing the effect of the revelation on Overt, he feels the need to decode his own discourse, and to make clear how his statement should be read:

You don't follow my figure: I'm not speaking of my dear wife, who had a small fortune, which, however was not my bribe. I fell in love with her, as many other people have done. I refer to the mercenary muse whom I led to the altar of literature. Don't do that, my boy. She'll lead you a life (p.262)!

Referring to Overt as 'my boy', and stating earlier that all his children are 'boys', confirm that the master at least on such occasions is not literal but metaphorical. It is the acolyte who is doing what Bloom describes as taking the earlier's terms and injecting them with a different sense. This would not have been possible had it not been for the nature of the metaphor itself: being open to different readings. The acolyte's perspective is to represent his predecessor in a different light, something that has nothing to do with literature, so that the birth of the new master becomes inevitable. This endows the tale with two orders of discourse but not for long.

The young novelist keeps reiterating his harassment until the master's discourse starts to turn literal, that is until the misreading becomes the reading, and misprision gets canonized in the text: 'Well, all I say is that one's children interfere with perfection, One's wife interferes. Marriage interferes' (p.264). The master's new literal discourse is clearer when he openly concedes to Paul's hermeneutics. 'They've given me subjects without number, if that's what you mean; but they've taken away at the same time the power to use them' (p.266; my emphasis). This double metalepsis - of the artist into the man, and of the metaphorical into the literal - confirms that the young novelist has humanized his master. Overt, therefore, has to curtail his transaction with the precursor. It is time for seeking solitude or 'askesis'.



The imagery of this phase - 'inside' or inclusion, and 'outside' or exclusion - is central to the tale. The first time the two characters meet, for instance, Overt transforms the master into a text to be read. This is important not only for its being a reification and a dehumanization, but for the narrative the ephebe projects onto that text: 'There were shades of meaning in it and a vague perspective of history which receded as you advanced' (p.224). (This recalls how the French actress, and the 'past' she represents, recede once Miriam Rooth marches ahead.) Recession here represents the fading away of St. George, and the advance of the young novelist. This centripetal image of the advancing ephebe, which is repeated in most of the influence tales, entails the expulsion of the precursor out of the literary establishment, as the image of the lamp and the twilight signifies.

While still decoding the master's face, Overt expresses his protest at the possibility of the other's gaiety: 'The change to the expression of gaiety excited on Overt's part a private protest which resembled that of a person sitting in the twilight and enjoying it, when the lamp is brought in too soon' (p.225). This is an iterative image in the sense that it sums up all the ratios. But suffice it here to say that the ephebe's insistence on the oneness with the twilight, and the exclusion of the lamp, stands for the 'inside' and the 'outside' of seeking solitude or 'askesis'.

The ephebe's solitude is not limited to the domain of imagery, for the young novelist is represented as

self-consciously seeking autonomy (he inside, the master outside). This occurs towards the end of Part Three. The master is boasting of hygienic discipline - no smoking and no nocturnal vigils. General Fancourt ironizes him, saying, 'I see, you are hothouse plants ... That's the way you produce your flowers' (p.243). The great novelist clears his throat and declares, 'I produce mine between ten and one every morning; I bloom with a regularity' (p.244)! The ephebe, like somebody who has seen 'the rabbit in the conjuror's sleeve', reacts to this exposition in a way that emphasizes self-definition. The narrator explains that 'The young man had an idea that he should never get used to that - it would always make him uncomfortable ... and he would want to prevent it' (p.244). St. George's 'regularity' and Overt's 'disengagement' recall Trollope's system and James's judgement of it:

He [Trollope] had taught himself to keep this pace, and had reduced his admirable faculty to a system. Every day of his life he wrote a certain number of pages of his current tale, a number sacramental and invariable, independent of mood and place.<sup>21</sup>

As in 'The Author of Beltraffio', the first 'half' of 'The Lesson of the Master' covers the bulk of the anxiety of influence. The second 'half' of the text is dominated by signs of its completion. This arises from the kind of ending the ephebe has embarked on. Instead of committing St. George to the cemetery of the masters, he gives him a lease of life, and stops criticizing or trivializing his books. He starts to reassure his precursor, and to offer him all kinds of praise,



phatic and extra-literary. For instance, when the earlier holds himself as an epitome of failure, Overt injects him with the phatic antidote: 'Why, your books are not so bad as that' (p.262). The prescription does not stop the master's deterioration, so the ephebe tries the Pollyanna formula: 'I see you in a beautiful, fortunate home, living in comfort and honour' (p.263). St. George feels the irony of such a 'home', for it signifies both literary success and literary death.

Paul's discourse is dialogic: it highlights what he intends to cover up: 'It had been his odd fortune to blow upon the deep water'. Hence the latter replies, 'You know as well as you sit there that you would put a pistol-ball into your brain if you had written my books' (p.266). The resurrection of the dead, or 'Apophrades', is genuinely brought into action this time. Paul 'launched himself into a passionate contradiction of his host's last declaration; tried to enumerate to him the parts of his work he loved, the splendid things he had found in it, beyond the compass of any other writer of the day' (p.267). This recalls what happens at the end of the letter James sent Mrs. Humphry Ward in reference to her Miss Bretherton. James lists the laurels of her book after he has laid it waste. And exactly as the letter suggests that Mrs. H. Ward turn reader, St. George turns reader and promises to be a committed acolyte to the new master, Paul Overt. The old ephebe (St. George) declares that he has stopped writing, and that 'for the rest of my life I shall only read you' (p.283).

## The Legend behind the Master:

### Anxiety as Intertextuality

The anxiety of influence in 'The Lesson of the Master', and Overt's triumph over Henry St. George, are rehearsed on another level. It is the intertextuality between the belated text, James's tale, and the precursorial folktale, 'St. George and the Dragon'.<sup>22</sup> For exactly as Paul Overt begins as an apprentice to Henry St. George, 'The Lesson of the Master' gives the impression of being modelled upon the folktale. But James's story, instead of being a mere replica, re-writes the ur-text, and supersedes it in the same way as the acolyte becomes the Master's Master. Interestingly enough, it is the ephebe, Paul Overt, who brings the conjunction between the two texts into play. In a dialogue with Marian about the book that Mrs. St. George has made her husband burn, Overt comments that 'St. George and the Dragon, the anecdote suggests' (p.231). This remark musters all the constituents: Overt, the Master, Marian, the tale and the folktale. Hence there must be a remarkable function for it.

According to James's discourse about the conflict between what he calls the 'anecdotic' and the 'developmental' in the Preface to 'The Author of Beltraffio', and his determination to produce short, rounded stories, the anecdote is supposed to reveal the source upon which 'The Lesson of the Master' is modelled. This entails a number of corollaries. For instance, it implies that the Jamesian characters relate to their folkloric 'constants' in the manner of the one-to-one



correspondence. It also indicates that all the narratological paraphernalia of the ephebal story are imitative of their counter-parts in the ur-text. This is what James means by anecdotism: the earlier text imprints itself on the belated one; or the latter, recognizing its diegetic level, does not go against its predecessor, but limits itself, in the manner of the 'anecdotic concession', to being a mere imitation.<sup>23</sup>

Such a premise should be endorsed by some correspondences between the two tales. But first what is the folktale about? It is about a dragon, a maiden and a saviour. The first, to be propitiated, requires a female to be 'sacrificed' daily to 'himself'. One day, it is the turn of the king's daughter, Sabra. She is placed at the mouth of the cave, but at the last minute she is saved by St. George. The latter kills the dragon, marries the maiden, and the two live happily ever after. The constants of the folktale are its dramatis personae: the 'dragon', the 'maiden' and the 'saviour'.

The first common denominator between the folktale and 'The Lesson of the Master' is onomencature. The great precursor in James's tale, Henry St. George, is named after the great folkloric saviour. Furthermore, both texts involve a medium of victimization. In the folktale, the women of the kingdom are offered daily to the dragon. In James's story, there are many forms of this function, but the most important one is St. George's preying on art. Hence the process of salvation. The folkloric St. George kills the dragon; and James's Paul Overt rescues art from the mercenary master. And the two texts, as

Vladimir Propp would like it, culminate in the thirty-first function of his morphology: 'wedding'.<sup>24</sup> But these similarities fall short of making 'The Lesson of the Master' a mere replica of 'St. George and the Dragon'.

James keeps the same functions, but with some modifications. His first tampering is an increase in the number of the variables. Instead of the dragon, Sabra and St. George, the tale has, not respectively though, St. George, his wife, Marian, Paul Overt and Art. Such a discrepancy, as Propp explains, is not anomalous: 'The names of the dramatis personae change (as well as the attributes of each), but neither their actions nor their functions change'. Hence the 'number of functions is extremely small, whereas the number of personages is extremely large'.<sup>25</sup> Propp means that the large number of the variables surfaces in different folktales, but what we have here is a larger number in the same work, which automatically complicates the concept of correspondence. The folktale has only one male constant, the saviour, and one female, the victim. In James's story, there are two male variables and two female substitutes. The question is who corresponds to whom.

The answer will be occluded by the impediment of the gender-barriers: how can the male and the female exchange places? The question is justified by the limitations Propp imposes upon this issue. For him, the correspondence between the variables and the constants is gender-bound. A male is replaceable only by another male; and a female can be substituted only by another female: 'The daughter may be



replaced by a sister, a bride, a wife, or a mother. The tsar can be replaced by the tsar's son, a peasant, or a priest'.<sup>26</sup> (his position is echoed by St. George, whose performance is informed by the male/female polarity. Everything for him is gender-bound. He represents the 'mercenary muse', for instance, as a female, which makes Overt mistake the muse for the wife. Moreover, his approach is not limited to a formalistic categorization of gender, for it is injected with value-judgements. He thinks that the female, contrary to the male, is the agent of imperfection. Indeed, his discourse can be boiled down to 'men rescue but women risk you'.

But unlike both Propp and St. George, James supersedes this dilemma with subtlety. He does not cross the realistic frontiers to the unrealistic, neither does he conduct a gender-blunder by turning men into women, or vice versa. At the same time he does not limit himself to the Proppean either-or rigidity. What he comes out with is the concept of function. Instead of turning the female into the male or the other way round, he makes them play each other's role. A woman can play the saviour, and a man can play the victim. This is made possible by the fact that the functions are common nouns that accommodate both the masculine and the feminine.

The increase in the number of the variables makes the one-to-one correspondence impossible. Hence the roundedness; or the intertextuality, of the Jamesian agents. Apart from two constraints which will be discussed later, each variable has a

triadic character: dragonian, sacrificial and messianic at the same time. In other words, it corresponds to all the folkloric constants, as the textual evidence demonstrates.

Art, to begin with, is personified because it is represented in the tale as a degree-zero variable. It is Sabra victimized by the mercenary drives of St. George. It is also sacrificed by Mrs. St. George in the form of book-burning. But like the other variables, it symbolizes something else. The constraints it imposes upon the artist make it dragonian. It denies the artist the person inside: no passion, no affection, and nothing but stony solitude. The personal is gobbled up by the dragon. Overt reacts to such a prospect saying, 'What a false position, what a condemnation of the artist, that he's a mere disfranchised monk and can produce only by giving up personal happiness' (p.269). The word, 'monk' embeds the reversal from the dragon-function to that of the saviour. It suggests that the man of letters has to devote everything to art as the monk gives up the secular for the sake of the Saviour. No wonder Art is sometimes referred to as the 'real thing' and the 'great thing', which is the divide between Salvation and damnation. Salvation is signified by what St. George says in this respect: if one has art, one will have everything, otherwise it is damned destitution (p.265).

Likewise, Mrs. St. George comprises all the folkloric constants. She represents herself as the saviour the moment she makes her debut. This arises from the premise that her husband is, in a metaphorical sense, positioned at the cave of literary



impotence. He himself keeps reiterating that his sack of life is empty; that the 'great thing' is beyond him; and that he is as good as struck blind. In other words, he is as helpless as a maiden before the dragon of artistic death. But his wife, playing the saviour, comes to the rescue. She self-consciously supplies him with the medium that invigorates him and resurrects his art. She offers him what people in the folktale offer the dragon: women. She says to Paul Overt: 'if she [Miss Fancourt] would make him write a few books it would be more to the purpose' (p.220). This probability, the wife as the saviour, is underlined by St. George himself. He gives her the credit of being his manager, his mentor, and guarantor for a secure future. After her death, he describes her, saying, 'She took everything off my hands - off my mind. She carried on our life with the greatest art, the rarest devotion, and I was free, as few men can have been, to drive my pen, to shut my self up with my trade' (p.273). No wonder he interdicts Overt from attacking his own 'benefactress' (p.273).

But the ephebe attacks Mrs. St. George because he sees a different part of her intertextual character. He repeatedly postulates that she is the dragon, not the saviour: she has made the great novelist burn one of his books. As a matter of fact, the discourse of henpecking feeds into the wife's being the victimizer, and terminator, of a Sabra-like husband. St. George himself sometimes blames the culinary decadence on the artist's secular escort (the members of the family). Whatever the case, Mrs. St. George is the only character to die in the

text. It is true that she has had the book burnt, but she has 'burnt' herself trying to rejuvenate the artist. She is a kind of Sabra, gone down the cave of St. George.

This centripetal trajectory, from the outside straight into the inside of the dragon's cave, is reversed in the role of Marian Fancourt. The first function she corresponds to is Sabra. She has been offered to St. George in the same way as any maiden is sacrificed to the dragon. This Sabra-role is emphasized by Overt's outcry at the end of the story. He puts her marriage to the master in the perspective of being put at the mouth of the cave. He thinks she is sacrificed 'to failure, to abdication, to superannuation' (p. 279). This is Overt's point of view. St. George's is different. The latter believes that her impact on art is dragonian. She may help art for a year after marriage, but 'After that she would be as a millstone around its neck' (p.268).

However, it is Marian's Sabra-function that transforms her into the opposite position. As mentioned above, her role is not to propitiate the dragon, but to invigorate him. This irony engenders the reversal from Sabra to Saviour, which is endorsed by the fact that she does not follow in the footsteps of Sabra or Mrs. St. George. As her name, (Fancourt), suggests, she manages to 'fan' and to 'court' the master into the possibility of a second phase of writing. At the end of the tale, the narrator says that the master may come out with a masterpiece. In short, he might have been saved.



To represent St. George as being 'saved' is one way of calling him a victim. Indeed, he corresponds to the function of Sabra. He is victimized by the mercenary muse, the false gods, and the secular escort. Moreover, his being the sacrifice is emphasized by the preliminary suggestion that his career is meant to be a 'lesson' for the young artist. But the latter, Paul Overt, knows that St. George's victimization is self-inflicted. For he himself has worshipped the false gods, preyed on the females of the kingdom, led the muse to the altar of the mercenary, and victimized Art.

In short, Henry St. George is the Dragon, not the Saviour. This probability is encoded in the way he thinks of women at large. Once, he tells Overt that Sabras cannot take part in a sacrifice, for 'They themselves are the sacrifice' (p.268). Indeed, they are, for he victimizes the two women in the tale - his wife and Marian. More importantly, St. George's study is architected in a way that makes it look like the Dragon's cave. To get to that room, one has to '[descend]' through a long passage to an apartment thrown out, in the rear of the habitation, for the special requirements ... of a busy man of letters'. From the inside, it is 'a large high room - a room without windows, but with a wide skylight at the top, like a place of exhibition' (p.258; my emphasis). Add to such a dwelling the 'ill-matched parts and the vulgar frame' of the dweller, and the dragonian function will crystallize. No wonder Overt calls him the 'mocking fiend' (pp. 282, 283). This phrase pulls all the threads together. An aged fiend is nothing but the old dragon. The latter is nothing but Satan himself,

who is the 'false god'. In short, Henry St. George is the mocking fiend is the false god is Satan is the old dragon. Of course such a pre/cursor cannot be a saviour. The claim that he might be Overt's redeemer does not stand to reason anymore.

Overt, like any ephebe, figures in the beginning as St. George's victim. All precursors, as Bloom says, try to destroy their acolytes. But the specificity of this process in James is that the forebears always resort to inartistic methodology. Madame Carre', as discussed in Chapters Two and Three, endeavours to stop Miriam short by telling her that she will make a good nurse and a good wife, but not an actress. Similarly, St. George tries to undermine Overt's progress by taking Marian away from him. But Overt transforms victimization into a salutary terror, and sublimates the inartistic conflict into an artistic focus. The outcome is that he becomes the new master, and the real saviour. He is not to blame for not saving Marian because he has been abroad at the time of her oblation. But he saves the real Sabra, Art, on which St. George has been preying all the time. Virginia Fowler, in Henry James's American Girl, demonstrates that 'James identifies his novelistic art as a feminine art'.<sup>27</sup> However, the way Overt performs the salvation is not only by continuing his literary production, but by writing masterpieces as well.

As mentioned earlier, what 'The Lesson of the Master' does to 'St. George and the Dragon' is paradigmatic of what Overt does to his precursor. Though latecomers, the story and Overt



contain, and supersede, their predecessors. Moreover, the two lend meaning to each other. The anxiety of influence is not only thematized as a conflict between the characters, but is rehearsed as a particular form of intertextuality. The precursoral text is supposed to function as a form of closure, which contains, and 'frames', the new text. But the latter, by introducing the intertextual variable, opens up the fixed text, and increases the possibilities within the necessary form of narrative closure. In short, just as an ephebe contains a precursor, James's story subsumes the folktale as a sub-text within itself. It is James, who has written 'St. George and the Dragon', the tale in which, St. George is the Dragon; Art is the victim; and the ephebe is the real Saviour.

Likewise, intertextuality not only confirms the anxiety of influence, but makes it possible. Replacing the mono-dimensional 'constants' of the folktale with the rounded 'variables' engenders the inevitability of dislodging the orchestration of the anterior text. What happens is like splitting the signified from the signifier. St. George is pushed out of his position into that of the dragon, which undermines his myth, and calls for a new saviour. And since the Jamesian Sabra is Art, the Jamesian St. George, or new Master, must be the one who gives art a lease of life: Paul Overt.

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- <sup>1</sup>F.O. Matthiessen, Henry James: Stories of Writers and Artists (Norfolk, Conn., 1944), p.1.
  - <sup>2</sup>F. Kermode, ed., The Figure in the Carpet and Other Stories, (London, 1986), p.7.
  - <sup>3</sup>David Leeming, 'A Conversation with Stephen Spender on Henry James' Henry James Review, 9 (1988), 128-35 (p.134).
  - <sup>4</sup>The Figure in the Carpet and Other Stories, pp.11-12.
  - <sup>5</sup>The Figure in the Carpet and Other Stories, p.12.
  - <sup>6</sup>The Figure in the Carpet and Other Stories, p.13.
  - <sup>7</sup>See Edward Wagenknecht, the Tales of Henry James (New York, 1984), pp.27-31.  
(Likewise, Wagenknecht argues that the story 'does not deal with literature as such but rather with a domestic crisis in a writer's life', p.28.)
  - <sup>8</sup>G. Genette, Narrative Discourse (Oxford, 1980), p.67.
  - <sup>9</sup>Henry James: Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 2.
  - <sup>10</sup>See T. Rahman, 'Ephebophilia: The Case for the Use of a New Word', Forum for Modern Language Studies, 24 (1988), 126-41.  
(The terminology he uses may be useful for the theme of influence, especially for 'The Great Good Place'.)
  - <sup>11</sup>V. Leitch, Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction (New York, 1983), pp.135-6.
  - <sup>12</sup>N. Bradbury, Henry James: The Later Novels (Oxford, 1979), p.70.
  - <sup>13</sup>P. Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production, (London, 1978), p.84.
  - <sup>14</sup>H. Bloom, Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present (New York, 1989), p.112.
  - <sup>15</sup>P. Coates, 'The Late Henry James: Substitution, Projection and the Guilty Eye', in The Realist Fantasy: Fiction and Reality Since Clarissa (London, 1983), pp.130-40 (pp.131, 132).
  - <sup>16</sup>M.G. Shine, The Fictional Children of Henry James (Chapel Hill, 1968), p.73.
  - <sup>17</sup>The Fictional Children of Henry James, p.73.
  - <sup>18</sup>Viola Hopkins Winner, 'The Artist and the Man in "The Author of Beltraffio"', PMLA, 83 (1968), 102-8 (p.102).
  - <sup>19</sup>L. Edel, ed., The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel by Henry James (Westport, Conn., 1976; first published in London, 1957), p.91.
  - <sup>20</sup>The House of Fiction, p.91.
  - <sup>21</sup>The House of Fiction, p.90.
  - <sup>22</sup>This section is a part of my research on the poetics of probability in James. The Jamesian text engages another, be it a literary work, a folktale, or an anecdote. The anterior source is supposed to function as a model, or a form of closure, for the belated replica. But James supersedes the one-to-one correspondence by the self-conscious play of 'a certain principle of probability' (AN, p.313). His 'variable' is a rounded, intertextual character that comprises all the 'constants' of the ur-text. If this free play applies to all the Jamesian 'variables', it is a 'circular' probability. But if one of the correspondences is dislodged - Henry St. George is not the saviour - it becomes a 'constrained' probability. In both cases, James produces a large number of combinations, which are



different ways of re-writing the precursoral model.

<sup>23</sup>The anecdotic, in James and glossaries of literary terms, is represented as a form of closure the repertoire of which comprises 'rigidity', 'brevity', 'squeezing', 'oneness', and 'roundedness'.

<sup>24</sup>For the thirty-one functions see, V. Propp, Morphology of the Folktale (Austin and London, 1968), pp.26-62.

<sup>25</sup>Morphology of the Folktale, p.20.

<sup>26</sup>Morphology of the Folktale, p.13.

<sup>27</sup>V. Fowler, Henry James's American Girl: The Embroidery on the Canvas (Madison, Wisconsin, 1984), p.7.

CONCLUSION**THE MASTERS AND THEIR MASTER:**

The conflict between the precursors and their acolytes draws the attention to the way they, the Masters, relate to Henry James himself, for he is a Master too. Are they modelled upon him? Or is there any discrepancy between the two sides that makes identification impossible? As has been demonstrated throughout the thesis, the precursors, in James's works, are consistently ironized and demythologized. Moreover, death, literally or metaphorically, befalls them all. Hence the ephebes become the new authorities, which suggests that the old masters are not the Master himself.

To ascertain the truthfulness of this conclusion I would like to introduce Nowell-Smith's Legend of the Master (Oxford, 1985). This is called for not only because the book is about the creator of the masters, but because its symmetry will illuminate the structural specificity that makes the ephebes triumph over their precursors. Moreover James's mastery, as illustrated in the book, reveals why the masters differ from James himself. Nowell-Smith distinguishes between the 'legend' and the 'master', as the titles of the first two chapters of his book confirm. These two terms weave the texture of the anxiety of influence. There is no anxiety without a master to be humanized, and a legend to generate the ephebal struggle.



The two terms, 'legend' and 'master', can be transformed into a framework of four important combinations. They are the 'legend of the master' (LM), the 'master of the legend' (ML), the 'legend of the legend' (LL), and the 'master of the master' (MM). 'LM' is about the myth, the deification, and the stories and anecdotes that together transform the man into the artist; the artist into a celebrity and the celebrity into a god. These create an image which represents the precursor as a master or an idol. As has been seen in the thesis, 'LM' engenders the anxiety of influence, and juxtaposes the ephebe and the precursor. All the ephebes begin as worshippers, or 'appointed ministers', at the temple of the great authority.

'ML', is a concretion of 'LM', for it is about the objective correlative, the icon, or the paragon of 'LM'. This construct entails the superhuman, the heroic and the mythical. The concept of man is below it, and a contradiction to it, which is the crux of 'The Lesson of the Master'. It is necessary, therefore, that these two combinations complement each other and betray no cracks. Any disjunction between the 'artist' and the 'man', or 'being' and 'doing', will engender the deconstruction of the legend, and the death of the master. However, the complication is inevitable, for all the masters are represented in a way that dooms them. The ephebes behold them as paragons of perfection, which feeds back into the fiction of power and the power of fiction. The image the ephebe has of his precursor is fatal, for whatever the latter does, he is almost predestined to fall short of that idealistic,

perfectionist fiction. Hence when the master fails to transcend, or be up to, his legendary self, he becomes humanized and easily superseded by the ephebe.

This 'Nietzschean' power-structure, transcending oneself, leads to the last two combinations, 'LL' and 'MM'. These are intrinsic, in the sense that their domain is not representation so much as self-representation. 'LL' is about the legend of the legend, or the story of the story. It addresses itself to the kind of myth woven about the artist, and the quality of the anecdotes attributed to him. Are they ironic, or unironic, real or 'make-believe'? Mallow's myth of mastery, for instance, is nothing but a complex lie woven by his wife and Peter Brench. Likewise, St. George's, as has been demonstrated, is a legend.

The 'Master of the Master', 'MM', refers to the artist -his self-consciousness, and self-definition. Does he, like James, represent himself as the authority and tell others to 'call me Master'? Or does he humble himself and say, 'I am a false god', as Henry St. George does? Indeed, both Overt and St. George underline the importance of this combination when they talk about the artist's audience. St. George argues that only two or three people really know the quality of the work of art. It is enough to satisfy them. Overt replies that he is contented to write for one person, St. George himself. The latter, sounding like James, says, 'The "one" is of course oneself - one's conscience, one's idea, the singleness of one's



aim' (p.261-2). This recalls James's position that one's 'audible vibration' is an audience large enough (Henry James's Letters, III, p.300).

The best demonstration of the workability of this framework is Nowell-Smith's book itself, for Henry James is a perfect model for the way the combinations synthesize the image. The 'legend of the master', 'LM', is reflected in what the others say about James, and the images they make of him. The book is strewn with evidence that they are fascinated by the Master. They deify him as the artist par excellence, and mythicize his character as superhuman. Elizabeth Jordan, for example, says, 'One of my earliest impressions of him had been gained from a photograph shewing him resting his head on his hand and looking as if he had written all the literature in the world' (my emphasis). Then she describes the first meeting which makes her realize 'the strange power of Henry James's eyes. They made me feel in those instants as if he had read me to the soul - indeed I rather think he had' (Legend of the Master, pp.29-30).

This account demonstrates that there is no disparity between 'LM' - what the photograph conveys to her - and 'ML' - what James in person turns out to be. No wonder acolytes, as Nowell-Smith says, 'worshipped' him (Legend of the Master, p.20). The 'legend of the master', 'LM', sets a high standard for the artist, and requires nothing less than the heroic, which James fulfils. He manages to transform himself from an American collegiate to an American Columbus, who

discovers Europe for the Americans (The American, p.8). He makes his life, and his career, the kind of material that only legends are made of.

The 'legend of the legend', 'LL', demonstrates how Jamesian James is. The autobiography, Alice's diary, Edel's biography, and the anecdotes about him, starting from the way he speaks to the man in the street when he and Edith Wharton get lost in London, via the way he communicates with children in Rye, and ending with death-bed stories, all confirm that James is James exactly as Zeus is Zeus, or as a hippopotamus is a hippopotamus. One wonders whether H.G. Wells, in Boon (London, 1920), is aware of the myth in describing James as a hippopotamus trying to pick up a pea (p.101). Similarly, the 'master of the master', 'MM', or the degree of self-consciousness about one's potential and real career for life, emphasizes James's precocity. He has known what his destination is, and has embarked on it at whatever cost. Defining himself out of America, heading for the 'Council of Gods' in Paris (LHJ, I, p.443), and establishing himself as the critic, and the Master, of the English novel, all demonstrate that he has never thought of himself other than a Turgenev, or a Balzac, if not more. In short, exactly as James the man becomes a Master, James the Master becomes a legend.

The importance of such a framework arises from the bearing it has on charting the precursor's future, be it mythologization or humanization. Since a perfect construct is



'LM'+ 'ML'+ 'LL'+ 'MM', it becomes clear that any missing factor will be a crack in the precursor's perfection; and the crack is the ephebe's path to mastery. An 'LM' without an 'ML' is a hollow legend. An 'ML' without an 'LM' is unmarketability. The absence of 'MM' is a deconstructive nucleus; and the quality of 'LL' functions either as a lionization, or an ironization, of the artist. This applies to all the masters in James's stories, as the following scherzo demonstrates.

In 'The Next Time', for instance, 'ML', 'MM' and 'LL' are in the text, but 'LM' is not. Its absence dooms the writer. The narrator makes clear that Ray Limbert is a Master. Ray believes in his own potential. But his problem is that there is no legend to facilitate his marketability. 'The Author of Beltraffio', as has been argued, has a different problem. The legend, 'LM', is so widespread that it attracts an ephebe from America. But there is a discrepancy between it and 'ML': Mark Ambient is ephebe-like and henpeckable. Similarly, 'The Lesson of the Master' seethes with 'LM', but both 'ML' and 'MM' flaw the construct. St. George is a 'shocking conjecture', not an icon of a master; a mercenary stockbroker, not a devoted artist; and an old dragon, not a saviour. In 'Greville Fane', the same pattern is repeated. By contrast, 'The Middle Years' suffers from 'MM'. 'LM', 'ML' and 'LL' are available in the tale. But the master does not believe in himself anymore. He thinks that he will not have another chance. He himself, that is 'MM', justifies his own downfall. The same pattern structures 'The Death of the Lion'. 'LM' establishes Paraday

as a lion in the jungle of letters. But there is a dichotomy between it and 'ML'. The master is manipulable, and not as lion-like as expected (Mrs. Wimbush manages to ambush him).

The interesting case, as always, is 'The Tree of Knowledge'. The tale has 'LM', 'MM', and 'LL' but lacks 'ML'. The legend of the master, 'LM', is so 'factual' that Morgan Mallow is rarely referred to as Mallow but as the 'Master'. He himself, 'MM', believes in his Mastery and understands why he should be worshipped. The legend of the legend, 'LL', is central to the tale, for it sustains the illusion and intensifies the make-believe. It is true that Mallow is a 'muff', but 'LL' muffles that fact, and keeps the game going. The pattern would not be far from perfection, were it not for 'ML'. The artist himself does not rise, as far as production and creativity are concerned, to the standard of the other combinations. His metaphorical death is symbolized by the sculpture he is commissioned to make: 'a bereaved couple from Toronto ... had given him the handsomest order for a tomb to their lost children' (CT,XI,p.100). The irony is that this tomb is supposed to make Mallow's 'fortune' (fortune means 'mishap or disaster' according to OED; perhaps death). Of course, Morgan Mallow is not making a tomb for the Toronto children. He is making it for himself. His own son, Lancelot, will bury him in it. Indeed, Lancelot, the militant ephebe, manages to know, despite all the mystification, what his mother and Peter Brench have always known: that the father is a failure, and that his mastery is a myth and a real death (pp.109-10).



This demonstrates that the masters are both independent of, and different from, James himself. Unlike his sworn celibacy, they are browbeaten. He has transformed every hurdle into a great chance, but most of them crumble at the first challenge. Moreover, most of them limit themselves to the one-sided and the exclusive: either art or morality, and either the artist or the market. They all fall short of what a master should be. Hence their demythologization, and their demise from legends to 'lessons'. For it is detrimental if the idol turns out to be a henpecked husband (Mark Ambient); the Saviour, an old dragon (Henry St. George); the god, an invalid (Dencombe); or the Master, a muff (Morgan Mallow). Writers of books should not look like book-keepers and stock-brokers; the makers of conventions should not be conventional (Gabriel Nash); those who work for posterity and renewal should not be symbols of fixity and 'pure tragedy' (Madame Carré); neither should the creators of hope look hopeless and desperate (Gloriani). Indeed, any contrast between the tales and The Legend of the Master will come to the conclusion that none of these precursors is, or can be, the Master himself. James humanizes all 'his' masters, terminates them, and suppresses the anxiety of influence for good. Having accomplished this daemonization, significantly in the Middle Period, he heads for the Major Phase and the undisputed Mastery.

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